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ARGOSY

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Stardust

"*CANST thou band the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?*"

Not in the summer, when the Pleiades and Orion are invisible, or visible just before sunrise when most of us are not star-gazing. But that sparkling cluster of diamonds, which is Pleiades, is now high in the east at eleven o'clock, and the mighty constellation of Orion is boldly flung across the eastern horizon. The pleasant summer sky has trickled away down the west.

Vega, which used to be overhead in the evening, now guards the northwest with a beautiful beam of light, but Arcturus and the Corona have dropped over the mountain wall. The Great Dipper, which stretched wide and grand across the sky all summer, now snuggles low on the northern hills. Cassiopeia, rocking her chair on the star-dust of the Milky Way, is directly overhead, having climbed high since August. Sirius, the brightest beacon in the heavens, does not clear the horizon until nearly one o'clock. It will be a month before we can lie in the light of Sirius in the evening.

But the winter sky, which is more vivid than the summer sky, is beginning to stretch its glittering garment over the earth. Castor and Pollux, the heavenly twins, are back. Rigel has returned. Capella sparkles on the rim of the Milky Way. And Aldebaran, that mighty pillar of red fire, is glowing in the constellation of Taurus. The sweet influences of Pleiades have been unbound indeed, and the bands of Orion have been loosened by the autumn night.

As the earth swings away from the sun, the richly jewelled sky of the winter fills the vast cavern of the night with splendour. The less light there is in our corner of the earth, the more light there is in heaven.

BROOKS ATKINSON, *Once Around The Sun*

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DARK COAST

Captain McRae toiled at the oars, knowing with every stroke that he could not be coming back

by MICHAEL FOSTER

PICKING up her heavy skirts to leave her ankles free, she hurried along the dim path towards the cabin of the witch woman.

Against the cold autumn sunset the smoky timbered ridges were darkening, and somewhere on a slope above her a hunting owl softly spoke of hunger. All the old people said that this winter —the winter of 1776—was going to be an early one. Low in the west, the evening star hung above an almost unknown continent.

For most of the way the path followed along the reaches of the tidal creek. Where it turned off into the deep woods, she stopped and looked back, for the silences were eerie tonight. A quarter of a mile back, the lights of the plantation house were shining serenely. But here—she listened. The tide was on the turn. Secretly, secretly the Atlantic was stealing inland. With a shiver at her heart she thought of the British frigate which had crept in from sea and was lying tonight off the dark coast.

There was a chink of orange firelight under the witch woman's warped door. The girl's white hand fluttered like a moth beating against the rough boards. She didn't hear a sound inside the cabin, but the door opened and the tall negro woman was standing there, silhouetted in the wavering light from the hearth.

"Oh, it's you, Miss Patty," she said. Her voice always startled the local people, it was hard and deep instead of drawling and soft; she didn't speak like the other negroes on any of the plantations.

"There's something you can do for me, Meliss," the girl said.

"Yes. I know." Meliss stood strong and proud and dark in the firelight. Her long head was bound tightly in a piece of saffron-coloured silk. She was a freed-woman, from Barbados; she owned herself. But when she spoke again it was in a low monotone out of the ancient heart of Africa. "Trouble's coming. Yesterday I killed a chicken and it didn't bleed right, Miss Patty. Three wild geese came flying, right over the fish-eagle's nest on top of the big snag up yonder."

Patty looked respectful. They understood each other very

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well, but you never knew just how much Meliss believed in her own magic, her own prophesying; or how much of it was for reputation.

In any case she could have heard the news by now. Negro fishermen, hauling back into the creek against the ebb tide of late afternoon, had stopped at the plantation house to tell Patty's father. The topsails of a frigate, British by their cut, had lifted slowly above the sea-horizon to the south east. They were far out of sight from the land; but as the fishermen watched, the fore-topsails swung round until they were aback, and the frigate lay motionless, hove-to.

Patty's father, sitting in his library with a finger marking his place in a book, listened to the fishermen. Then he sent them round to the kitchens for noggins of rum. Finding his snuff-box, he took a thoughtful pinch, spilling some on his brocade waistcoat. "Run along, my dear, and tell your mother," he said to Patty. "She'll know what to make of it."

Lots of people had probably heard about it by now; the tavern would be loud with talk. But nobody would know what to make of an enemy frigate hanging around under the horizon, off this obscure creek and settlement of the North Carolina coast.

"Well, anyway, Meliss," Patty said, pulling from her bodice a note of folded creamy paper. Meliss took it gravely, and tucked it away in her own calico front.

"I think it's still too early. I'd be seen," she said. "I'll go when it's full dark. Some tea now, Miss Patty?"

"Yes, thank you," Patty said with the good manners of a child, for Meliss must have been at least thirty-five years old, and Patty was only just eighteen.

Sitting on a crude rush-bottomed chair Patty arranged her voluminous skirts of figured ivory taffeta; and drinking their tea the negress and the girl talked quietly in the firelight.

Meliss had a curious history: Patty's Uncle Edward, who owned sugar plantations in Barbados, had freed her after she had saved his two children in a fire; and she had asked to be sent to America. So one day a rum schooner bound for Boston put in to the settlement at the mouth of the creek and landed Meliss with a second-hand sea-chest. On the rickety wharf she asked whereabouts in the district the Corneil family lived.

Patty's father had given Meliss this cabin. She lived here utterly alone. In a leaky old boat with a lug-sail she went out to sea and fished like a man. All the plantation negroes for miles around were afraid of her, but they came to her for prophecies, for love philtres, and for charms to keep them safe in a world owned by white folks.

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Everything about her—her power, her foreignness—set her apart. Sweet-voiced local negroes often averted their eyes when they passed her on the road in the light of day.

Sipping her tea out of a cracked china cup, she abruptly asked Patty, "Will he be there?"

"Oh, yes," Patty said earnestly. "I saw his horse at the hitching-rail outside the tavern when I rode by this afternoon."

They both smiled. These errands of Meliss's were very familiar to them, though they kept up a feminine pretence that each one was something unusual, a breathless occasion.

Touching the paper concealed at her breast, Meliss said, "It's time now. I'll walk with you, far as the big house. It's the dark of the moon."

So, when the stars were two hours higher over the coast, Patty and Dan McRae stood in the summerhouse at the foot of her father's formal gardens, above the silent black waters of the creek. They were standing very close together, in fact Patty's face was buried in the plain linen ruffle under his throat, and his arms were holding her awkwardly, still a little shyly, but competently enough. Somewhere in the shrubbery between them and the lighted windows of the plantation house, Meliss kept look-out. Naturally Patty's parents objected to a serious young sandy-haired lawyer from the backwoods, for Patty was the granddaughter of a marquis, one of the bravest titles in Britain, and Dan was born on a gaunt hillside farm among the Scots-Irish settlements in the back-country.

"Oh, Patty dear," he whispered, "how many years will it be?"

"That depends upon you, I should think—and the Continental Army," Patty said sensibly. "I've told you at least a hundred times that I'll marry you the minute you can quit soldiering, so we can have a home."

He said earnestly: "I'm positive that my future as a lawyer will—"

"Oh, Dan, we've been over it and over it and over it, too many times," Patty said. "I think you'd better kiss me again, now. I believe things better when you just kiss me and don't argue."

But she was awfully proud of him. As a captain, Dan was on leave from General Washington's army to raise another company of men in this countryside, and drill them.

As Patty's go-between and look-out, Meliss carried her notes to the stable boy at the tavern who then took them up the back stairs to Dan's rooms. Without doubt, a great number of coloured folk knew all about it, but not Patty's father and mother.

Once or twice since Dan had come home from the army they had been able to meet in the afternoon, far away, walking their

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horses through the autumn woods. That was where they had met in the first place; except that then it had been Spring-time, when Patty was just past sixteen. A half-broken colt which she had been forbidden to ride had thrown her and bolted, and she was stalking indignantly home along a forest trail when a tall and homely young man came riding by with a law-book under his arm . . .

Usually, though, they met after dark in this summerhouse. They could vanish in any direction if Meliss whistled like a half-awakened bob-white in the shrubbery. Once when Patty was seventeen Dan paid a formal call upon her parents: there had been a courteously freezing scene in the drawing room, and she was not going to risk it again just yet. She was proud of him, but she wished he were not *quite* so patriotic: it took up so much of his time.

"Dan," she said, "you mustn't worry so, dear. I know you think my family frivolous, and probably me too, but I see my future very well. As the wife of a serious famous man, I will pour the tea, and make conversation, my eyes just batting and flashing at you, and when I'm an old woman I will have the most perfect tinkling laugh for our guests. Everyone will say, 'That learned jurist—what a shame he has a frivolous wife.' But I will keep you from worrying as much as I can."

Dan's thin face had a strange tough charm when he smiled, perhaps because he didn't very often. "We'll get along all right, Patty. I swear to you that I'll—"

"No solemn oaths, no great roaring promises, dear," she said, "just smile at me. I see things better when you do."

"But we have to be serious when we're planning permanently," he said. "All my life I've had to be—"

"I know, dear. That's where I come in to help you, perhaps. A plan that begins with a smile and a kiss may outlast all your thinking and all your wars. Not," Patty added hastily, "that I am planning an *especially* large family, but—"

Then they suddenly turned their heads and listened, but not because they had heard the cry of a bob-white. The sound had come from the dark tide of the creek, downstream.

It could have been a belated negro fishing boat coming in on the tide; but it wasn't, it was a too softly precise and massive sound of many oars in muffled oarlocks. There were no voices, but they could hear men breathing. They heard the uneasy scrape of a boot-heel on wet floorboards, a snuffle, a sigh and then saw a faint flash of muddy paleness as an oarblade bit raggedly in a tidal swirl. From the summerhouse they saw an immense, crowded shape materialize out of the blackness and the silent tide, a long white glimmer, a sense of heavy, rhythmic motion—a ship's boat feeling its way up the creek.

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Patty's mouth was open, and instantly Dan's hand was on it, his lean fingers were pressing hard against her lips. So she kissed them and said nothing. The boat crawled past, its many oars half heard, half seen. At the plantation wharf, up the creek, there was a crushed-barnacle scrape, a hollow *clunk*, the stealthy scrape and thumpings of oars being shipped, and a quick ring of confident boot-heels on the planks of the landing-float. Then the ship's boat was returning downstream, sliding past neatly and much faster, even against the uncertain tide; and Dan was leaving Patty, stepping quietly from the summerhouse on to the lawn . . . for on the plantation wharf the boat had left a tall figure, indeterminate, wrapped in a boat cloak, walking slowly, outlined dimly against the starshine.

Meliss whistled twice, and was silent. The muffled figure passed along a gravelled path, towards the house. Then he was out of sight in the shrubbery, and Patty and Dan were stealing after him across the lawns.

Round a corner of the house, the stranger stood outside the lighted french windows of the library, where Patty's father sat reading. After a moment he tapped on the glass.

They saw her father look up, they saw the book fall from his hands as he stared at the face which floated above the dark cloak in the night outside. The man from the boat opened the door for himself and walked in. The two men started to shake hands, fumbled, and with clumsy dignity embraced each other instead. Laughing, the newcomer slipped the heavy cloak off his shoulders and tossed it across the back of a chair. Thin and straight and hawk-handsome he stood there in the scarlet and gold and white of a British general.

Rooted with horror, Patty felt Dan's arm give one convulsive jerk and then become very steady.

"I suppose it could be my Uncle John," Patty said faintly. "Perhaps it's only a family visit."

"Your uncle—you mean the present marquis? Put ashore from a British frigate, and wearing a British uniform?"

Patty nodded in silent misery. "If that's who it is," she said.

"It's ruin," Dan said in a flat and terrible whisper. "Utter ruin for your family. And death, I think—for a lot of other people."

Patty's father was crossing the library, calling up the stairs; calling to his wife who had her sitting room above. When he came back, on a sudden thought he came all the way to the outside french windows and drew the curtains.

In the abrupt complete darkness Patty said evenly, "Dan, what do you mean—death for a lot of other people?"

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"You know the privateer the men are fitting out."

"Yes," she said, with ice at her heart. In the little shipyard at the mouth of the creek a coastal trading-sloop was being re-rigged for war.

"The talk in the tavern tonight was all for putting the guns aboard and going out to fight this frigate," Dan said grimly. "Fourteen guns against at least forty-four."

"But—"

"Our letters of marque haven't arrived yet from Congress, to make it a legal privateer," Dan said. "Every man in the sloop who survives the battle will be hanged as a pirate from a British yardarm."

"Dan, would you be in the sloop?"

"If it comes to it. With every good fighter I can get."

There was another presence in the darkness, almost beside them; and another voice. It was Meliss. "The sea," she said. "I listen, and the sea talks to me. It will hide the dead men." Patty shivered. Often she had seen Meliss in her battered old boat creep down the creek in the mists of early morning. "But the land," Meliss whispered in a strangled voice, "—I see the shadows of two men dancing—dancing high above the grass."

Patty said sharply, "Meliss, please go home."

"No." Meliss' tone became practical. "Mr. Dan has to go. They will be looking for you, Miss Patty. Trouble enough without this," she reached out and touched Dan's blue coat with the buff facings of the Continental Army uniform. "The man in the King's red would kill. See his sword. He smiles, but he would kill, for his own life."

"Dan!" Patty said. "You haven't even a—"

"I don't clank round in my side-arms when I come to see my girl," Dan said with the suppressed fury of humiliation.

"The rose garden door. Quick, go to your room, Miss Patty!" Meliss urgently took her arm. "They will be calling you. Hear all the talk you can, and—"

"She's right," Dan said harshly. "You've got to find out what this means. You're the only one who can do anything tonight."

He kissed her lightly, bitterly, and was gone. After a time they heard his horse on the starlit road.

"Oh dear," Patty said. "I think you'd better go home and stir up some spells, Meliss. Powerful ones."

She didn't go to her room, and she didn't wait to be called. Slipping in through the rose garden door, Patty went along the wide, dimly shining hall. The library door was closed. She opened it and walked in.

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Her mother was there, her face nearly as white as her glittering white-powdered hair. But she said in her brightest voice, "Oh—Patty! This is your Uncle John."

Lord John bowed gravely, but his twinkling eyes, watching her, didn't let it be too serious.

"Charming," he said, "to meet the first American-born member of my family."

He had unbuckled his sword-belt, and wrapping it around the sheathed blade, had laid them on his cloak. His thin pale face with the tiny black court plaster cheek-patch of the London dandy, his suavely dazzling white wig tied at the queue with a wide black ribbon of watered silk—even through her terror Patty thought that this uncle of hers was the most romantic-looking man she had ever seen. Her bookish father in his brown-green velvet looked positively dowdy beside his elder brother, the marquis.

"I've just been presenting my apologies to George and Maria," Lord John said, waving an airy hand towards her father and mother. "And now to you, Patty, m'dear. My visit must be—ah, something less than a formal one. Fact is, I'd better keep out of sight from the servants."

George Corneil coughed, and looked anxiously at his wife. And then at his daughter. "By all means," he said. "And I'll give you some clothes, John, that will be less—well—conspicuous."

"I'll keep the uniform," Lord John said carelessly. "Without it I might be hanged as a spy."

"Perhaps you don't understand the temper of our people," Patty's mother said, still brightly. "If you are caught they'll hang you anyway. And probably George, too."

So that was what Meliss had meant, Patty thought, her father would be one of the two men dancing, high above the grass. Abruptly, sick in her soul, she knew it could come true. And Dan—and the men of the settlement—going out to fight at sea—how many silent figures would swing in the wind, because of this?

For the first time she saw a trace of the steel in Lord John's eyes. "I'm on the King's business," he said. "Men of our family have died for it before. But to think of poor old George, here—" and he laughed lightly and affectionately, poking his brother in the sober ribs.

"Dear John . . . it's sometimes so difficult to be the perfect hostess," Patty's mother murmured, eyes brilliant in horror. "I now thank heaven for the sound social training my mother gave me as a young girl. You see how valuable it is, Patty. I've not yet screamed, even once."

From his fingertips Lord John blew a kiss towards her. "You're still our Maria, even in the wilderness. When we were all younger,

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I'll admit that in your first London season I was almost tempted to be solemn. Until I saw the look in George's eye."

"Who showed you the way into the creek tonight, and to our wharf?" Patty asked. "You must have had a local pilot."

Lord John nodded indifferently. "Fellow named Leath, I believe. My frigate is one of the West Indies squadron, and our people at Kingston sent this creature aboard for us. Said he used to live here. Of course he doesn't know who I am, George. He was kept under guard."

"So it was *that* renegade," Patty said fiercely.

For an instant the steel stood naked in Lord John's eyes, while he looked at her.

"You really are American, young Patty," he said in sudden faraway gentleness.

"The child means nothing, John," her mother said. "This Leath was an overseer of ours. He did a bit of loud talking at the tavern and got himself suspected of being a loyalist. They were going to tar and feather him, or something of the sort, perhaps worse. It became quite disagreeable. At any rate, George furnished him with money and a horse so he could run away to Charleston and take ship. There was a scene in this room when he insisted upon weeping with gratitude. Most disgusting."

Fumbling his snuff-box, nearly dropping it, George Corneil reached hurriedly for the satinwood box which held his decanter and glasses, and at the same time he shot an imploring glance at his daughter. Biting her lip, Patty looked down at the floor.

With one of the stemmed crystals filled with brandy twirling slowly in his fingers, Lord John became smilingly urbane, though somewhat absent-mindedly. Patty had to admit that it was slightly magnificent that the three older people began talking casually of family news, and the latest London gossip.

"I'll say goodnight now," Patty said, demurely being the dutiful daughter.

Her mother hesitated; it was her obligation as hostess to leave the men alone with their brandy. But George Corneil said gruffly: "Maria will stay, John. Any business we have is hers too."

"I'd better see that the outside door's locked," Patty muttered. Parting the curtains, she turned the key in the lock of the french windows. But when she came back, when she spread her skirts in a deep curtsy to her Uncle John, the key was clasped firmly in her hand. Coolly, benignly, he bent and kissed her forehead.

This time, Patty went upstairs to her room, and it was well that she did. Fifteen minutes later she heard her mother coming up the stairs, and then her voice, sending her maid away. Patty hastily took the pins out of her hair and shook it loose about her

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shoulders. She was out of her dress and was standing there in her petticoats when her mother came to her door.

Smiling, they said goodnight again as if nothing were wrong, although her mother added, "How fortunate that you're not seeing that young McRae any more. It would be so inconvenient just now."

With a friendly little nod she left, but instead of going back downstairs she went into her sitting-room and Patty could hear her walking up and down, up and down, fighting for the self-control she was going to need. If Maria Corneil ever wrung her hands, nobody ever saw it. Afraid she would come back, Patty had to blow out the candles and get into bed.

When at last her mother went down to the library again, Patty gave them another ten minutes, to be on the safe side. After dressing in the dark, and pinning up her hair again with shaking fingers, she crept down the staircase in her stockinged feet. Putting her shoes on outside the rose garden door, she hurried round the corner of the house.

At the french windows of the library she could hear their voices, but not what they were saying. With infinite caution she got the key into the lock, and waiting until their voices clashed in animation she turned it slowly, so slowly that it was silent. Then, a quarter of an inch at a time, trusting to the heavy curtains, she opened the door the merest crack . . . and sighed. For they were still carrying on the most gracious, the most interested conversation about family and friends in England.

For what seemed hours she shivered there at the door, while they kept it up. But after a while she suddenly realized that through all the intimate small-talk of remembrances shared, Lord John was coldly reminding his brother and sister-in-law that they were still a part of one of the great families of Britain. Patty was becoming positive that her night out of doors would result in swamp fever, when Lord John dropped his finesse and said impatiently:

"Well, I'll be blunt. George, I call on you for service to your King."

There was an answering rumble in George's throat, but it was Maria's crisp voice which said, "It's time for practical terms, John."

"Yes," he said. "Thank heaven, Maria, that you have a brain. Very well, then: we consider that North Carolina is of the greatest strategical importance. It's been a hotbed of revolt, especially along portions of the coast and on the far wilderness frontier. It's in His Majesty's blackest books—his hanging-books, so to speak—because your Mecklenburg county committee last year wrote a resolution trying to abrogate the powers of the Crown,

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the first such officially written treason. And your North Carolina radicals were the first in America who dared instruct their delegates in the so-called Congress to work for actual independence and the forming of foreign alliances. A vast plague of treason, George, calling for the cure of hemp.

" On the other hand," he went on, " there is the great petition of loyalty to the King, signed by fifteen hundred men in the central and western counties. And the army of loyal subjects that Donald McDonald marched towards the coast from there, last winter. It matters little that they—ah, didn't win at Moore's Creek . . . The important thing is this : that while your radicals call it a revolutionary war, it is actually a civil war, in all the colonies, with the loyalists not far outnumbered—especially, as I say, in North Carolina. Our operations in the southern colonies are to assume great importance, and it is in the Carolinas and Georgia that we will first crush the rebellion, and I have a brother here to call upon ! "

" Great things were expected when a British fleet hung about off Cape Fear last spring," Maria said.

" A plan that didn't—ah, quite come off," Lord John admitted. " But about George, here. We want a powerful agent on this part of the coast. His Majesty's loyal subjects need help, and co-ordination. As a member of our family you will carry great weight with their leading men, and you will be too valuable to be risked openly. So I will give you the names of the secretly loyal people here, through whom you will receive your—"

Patty heard her father give a great sigh. " I will speak now," he said, " before you mention any neighbours of mine, John. I had hoped . . . if it were only to shelter you, to help you on your way upon some errand . . . That I would do for my brother. But this business : no. I have changed, John. America changes people. America, and these books. A new wind is blowing in the books of the world."

Patty gasped, though she knew her father's gentle mind. As a remote disciple of the new Age of Reason, which the most modern minds were bringing to flower, he believed abstractly in abstract principles of liberty ; but so did many a wealthy man, and even a few noblemen. She hadn't known how far his beliefs went outside the walls of his library.

" You were always a plodding fool, George. Maria, for God's sake break into his dream and tell him that he—"

" I'm with George," she said quietly.

There was a long pause before Lord John said in the iciest voice that Patty had ever heard : " I must remind you both that our family holds its power and its dignity under the Crown. Treason is the greater in your case. It will be remembered, I assure you."

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With the poor fumbling dignity of the scholar and the dreamer Patty thought, perhaps the greatest dignity in the world—her father said slowly:

"This is my family, here. A new family and a new land, since you've forced me to choose. Perhaps I hadn't wanted to have to choose. But there's a deeper treason, John. The treason of a man against his own mind. And that I will not be guilty of. Remember that, when I hang because of this night. And forgive me if you can, for we were boys together."

Shrill with passion, Lord John was almost screaming: "By God, sir, as a King's officer I charge you with—"

And Patty heard no more, because there were quick hard steps coming in the darkness behind her and she was whirling to run . . . Dan brushed past her and was through the door, thrusting the curtains aside with a sweep of one arm.

When Patty got there, he was standing between Lord John and his sword, which lay across a distant chair. The three older Corneils sat transfixed; the arrested gestures, the expressions, of their own quarrel slowly dropping away, slowly fading. Dan had a cocked pistol in his hand. It was pointed at the gold and scarlet of Lord John's breast.

"Stay where you are," he said. "All of you." He was breathing quickly, tightly, from hurry, fighting for breath.

Lord John slid down a little lower in his chair, and deliberately brought his fingertips together, balancing them, tapping them gently against one another, before they were still. From under slanting eyebrows, with contemptuous pale eyes of death, he watched Dan. "Well?" he said.

"I've just come from the settlement," Dan said. "Listen to me. That renegade Tom Leath you brought as pilot jumped out of the boat and swam for it. I suppose your men were afraid to shoot in the creek. Anyway, Leath made it. He came sopping wet into the tavern and yelled out the alarm. He wants to be a patriot with us now."

Lord John's expression had changed most curiously. With profound puzzled wonder, he stared at this young Continental captain. But then, glancing at Patty's face, he framed a silent O with his lips.

"There's time," Dan said. "Leath says he doesn't know where the boat landed, nor why. He says he jumped and swam for it while the boat was coming upcreek, before it touched anywhere."

Lord John shook his head decisively, but murmured, "Gratitude, George? For the money and the horse you gave him when he was

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in trouble here? I assure you the fellow was in the boat the last I saw of—"

George said heavily, "So he jumped from the boat on the way back downcreek. Knowing the man, I expect he plans to wring me for more money."

"Never mind Leath," Dan said sharply. "The boys don't like a double traitor and I think there will be an accidental shot somewhere, before morning. But they're rousing the neighbourhood. The whole settlement is a hornet's nest. In half an hour armed men will be scouring the countryside. They'll be here soon."

"And apparently you've captured me, young man," Lord John said.

Dan's face was white with agony. "Be damned to you, sir! But I won't see Patty's father hanged—by the light of this burning house. That's what they'd do. Take your sword. I'm going to get you out to sea in one of the plantation's boats. I suppose you have signals arranged with the frigate . . . I thought so. Well, come on." Strangled with hate, he said: "You'll be safe with me. And I'll rot the rest of the war in a British prison hulk."

"I'll parole you."

"And I come back here? And explain?"

Frantically, Patty was tugging at his free hand. "But why can't he go by himself?"

"Because they're arming the privateer. They're trundling the guns aboard, working by torchlight. And by this time the mouth of the creek is alive with boats, and he'd be caught in a boat from this plantation. They'll pass me—I command the militia here. His . . . his lordship will be lying down out of sight, covered up with an old canvas or something. Come on, you. We're going."

Lord John got up, crossed the room, and buckled on his sword-belt. He managed to make it a supremely ironical gesture. But his tight smile faded, and with suddenly humbled eyes he turned away when for a long moment Patty put her head on Dan's shoulder. She didn't say anything; and when she lifted her lips to his, Dan found them firm and proud. Her goodbye was one clear and silent look—a silence that Dan would remember all his life, more than any words.

George Corneil plodded heavily to the curtained door, and went out. Dan followed him, walking quickly, not even glancing back at Patty, while Lord John bowed gently over Maria's hand. Once, on the gravelled path leading down to the plantation wharf, Dan stumbled; and George Corneil's hand was on his arm for an instant, for a steadying instant in the starlight. Dan heard a sigh, and Patty's father saying quietly: "Time will pass, son, and we'll be waiting here."

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In the boat-house on the wharf, among all the odds and ends of tackle, they had found a bull's-eye lantern for signalling the frigate, and had lighted it, when Lord John walked in. In the narrow beam of light, the faces of the two brothers floated there disembodied and motionless, harshly distinct against the darkness, and then George said: "We needn't pretend that we'll ever see each other again, John."

"You Americans are a hard lot," the general said. "But remember, nothing can change our being brothers."

Dan, knowing at last that Patty's father was loyal to the cause of the Colonies, picked up the lantern and clicked the shutter closed. They walked down to the float. "We'll take the skiff," he said.

So that is how a British general went out to sea, lying flat under a lot of old sail and fish-net, while a Continental captain toiled at the oars, a Continental captain knowing with every bitter dip and haul that he couldn't be coming back. As they passed the shipyard they heard the rumble of the guns being sweated aboard the privateer while the torches flared. As they felt the first long lift of the open sea, a boat hailed them, Dan hailed back, and they went on.

An hour out, the offshore wind came up behind them. The sea awoke in little voices all around. Sitting on the stern seat with his boat-cloak thrown off, the general bailed in all his splendour, while Dan at the oars fought silently to handle the skiff on the great slopes of water. Another hour and the general picked up the bull's-eye lantern and began signalling towards the horizon, snapping the shutter open and closed in code flashes. After a long time, a tiny spark, far away, began winking back across the vast running waters.

"One bargain," Dan said, "in return for your life. A little sloop is coming out to fight at dawn. It hasn't got a chance against the broadsides of your frigate. It will be filled with friends of mine."

"I understand," the general said. "The frigate will sail as soon as I go aboard. I will order it."

The frigate did not signal again. At long intervals Lord John would open the shutter of the lantern for a brief flash. Low on the eastern horizon a cluster of stars, dim in the wind, suddenly went out. "They're coming in to meet us," Lord John said, and put the lantern down to grab the bailing-scoop once more.

It was Dan, facing astern, weary with the tug and the live kick of the oars as the skiff swooped high and fell away, who saw the boat coming up behind them. At first he couldn't be sure. It was

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only an uncertain but dancing bit of the distant coast which had detached itself; a glimmer of movement, something which made a quickly-fading patch of ghostly foam where there shouldn't be one. And then, abruptly, it was almost upon them: an awkward square lugsail lifting to the top of the flowing sea behind, and an untidy dark shape sliding half-sideways down the hill of water as a crouched figure in the stern put the tiller over to bring that boat into the wind almost beside them.

It was Meliss in the stern.

And from the darkness under the sail, Patty's voice called matter-of-factly: "We've been following your lantern-flashes. Come over into this boat, Dan. Meliss and I have it all worked out. It was really so simple, once somebody stopped to think about it. Uncle John is safely on his way, and we've come to take you back."

As both boats slid upward on the next big swell, the gunwales scraped with a sickening lurch in passing. And in that instant, with a clatter of shipped oars, Dan jumped.

"That's better," Patty said. "We'll go home now."

Meliss in the stern crooned softly over the tiller, and under the patched lugsail her crazy fish-slimey old boat went reaching away into the wind, towards the coast. The last glimpse they had of Lord John was a lonely figure left adrift, with the loom of the frigate coming up—a lonely figure with its faint glitter of gold lace in wet starlight, raising one hand in a gesture of farewell . . . or of blessing.

"I hope, Dan," Patty said crisply, "that when we're in our own home, we'll never have so much trouble seeing a guest off."

* * *

SECRET VICE

A local family with a high regard for ancestral relics has been treasuring for seventy-five years or so a handsome gold-headed walking stick, originally the property of a respected forbear, a noted divine. According to family legend, this ancestor, forgoing lunch, always set out for a long walk every Sunday right after his sermon, the stick tucked under his arm, his head bent in meditation. He would return in time for vespers, from the direction of the North River, beside whose placid waters, it was generally assumed, he had continued his self-communion.

He left the cane to his only child, a daughter, and *she* left it to *her* only child, a daughter, and it was immobilized until last month, when the divine's great-grandson, upon receiving it from his mother as a sixteenth-birthday present, examined it carefully, unscrewed its head, and drew forth a small, sturdy fishing-rod.

From *The New Yorker*

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THE CAT AND THE CORNFIELD

"Do you never tire of bein' fettered, master?" asked the girl

by BRYAN MacMAHON

IN Ireland all you need to make a story is two men with completed characters—say a parish priest and his clerk. There at once you have conflict. When, as a foil for the pious clerk, you throw in a mature tinker girl, wild and lissom, the love interest is provided in addition to the conflict. And when finally for good measure you supply a snow-white cat, a cornfield and a shrewish woman who asks three questions, the components if properly assembled should at the very least provide a moderate tale.

The scene is laid in a tiny village drowsing on a summer hill and the hour of the day is mid-morning. The village is composed of a church that lacks a steeple, a pair of pubs—one thatched and the other slated, with maybe a dozen higgledy-piggledy houses equally apportioned between thatch and slate. The gaps in the houses yield glimpses of well-foliaged trees beyond which is the countryside falling away into loamy fields on all sides.

On the morning of our story, the parish clerk, a grumpy fellow of middle age with small irregular red features, by name Denny Furey, was sweeping out the brown flags of the chapel porch. He was dressed in the cast-off black of a dead parish priest; his black hat was hanging from a nail beside the holy water stoup. In the presence of the public it had always been the privilege of the parish priest to bully the clerk; when the pair were alone the clerk invariably extracted his revenge. On Saturday night when the parish priest took his seat in a zinc bath in front of the open fire and the clerk poured in boiling water from a large iron kettle, the pair could be heard arguing: "Do you want to scald me alive, you blackguard?" or the clerk's reply, "Stop steady, will you? You're like a hen on a hot griddle!"

Having brushed the porch the clerk took up the wire mat at the door of the chapel and tried to shake three pebbles out of it. The pebbles were tenacious and tantalizing. The clerk grew angry with them and also with the priest who had approved of this new-fangled type of mat, advancing the plea that at all costs they should be modern in their ideas.

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At the sound of the rattling pebbles, the clerk's loyal white cat, who was sitting on the sunny wall of the church beside the clerk's cabin, looked up and mewed soundlessly out of his corrugated biscuit-coloured mouth. The cat—he had green pale eyes and a nose with a single blotch at the end of it—was called Pangur Bán: the priest had named him for a cat in one of the oldest Gaelic poems extant which was said to have been written by a mediæval scribe working in his beehive cell:

Myself and Pangur Bán my cat
Similar tasks we are at
Stalking mice is his delight
Stalking verbs I spend the night.

Pangur Bán's loyalty could at times prove embarrassing to his master: his crouched presence on the window of the local tavern late at night could inform the priest out for a late airing that his clerk was still sipping beer. But the clerk forgave Pangur Bán for his misguided loyalty and each night he made a nest of his empty breeches beside the bed; in this nest the cat slept, for which repose Denny's shanks were truly thankful on cool mornings.

In the midst of Denny Furey's endeavours to dislodge the pebbles there came a merry sun-muted sound of harness bells. A tinker's spring cart, painted bright green and blue with a shaggy piebald cob harnessed to it, drew slowly past the chapel. The daisied earth of the lawn came almost level with the crenellations of the wall between it and the road. Sitting on the wide wing of the spring cart was a young tinker girl, wearing a tartan shoulder-shawl. Eighteen, perhaps; more likely, nineteen. She had wild fair hair and a clean complexion. Her bright clothes indicated the magpie nature of her mind. Her roving eye became filled with gaming as she spied the parish clerk wrestling with the chapel mat.

Seeing her, Denny began to grimace ill-temperedly. His first reaction was to turn his back on her. Then he found himself impelled by an innocent curiosity to learn whether or not the girl would cut the Sign of the Cross on herself whilst jogging past the chapel gateway. This she did the instant the clerk's eye lighted upon her. Denny grunted his satisfaction. Then, just beyond the gateway, the pony's lazy motion came to a halt. Denny threw down the rat-trap of a mat. The girl was watching him. He was tempted for a moment to shout, "Shoo! Shoo! Be off! I'm the parish clerk! Next to the priest I'm greatly to be feared! Be off with yourself at once, I say!"

And then he couldn't help thinking, "Eighteen or more likely nineteen is reckoned old for a tinker girl to be still on her own."

Pangur Bán looked at the girl, then raised himself on white

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shuddering legs and gently arched his back, while from his pink mouth a gracious but soundless mew of welcome was sent in her direction.

"That you may be lucky, master!" the tinker girl said. Not begging she was, just blessing. Or . . . was it blessing? The parish clerk did not venture to reply.

"Your wife—have she e'er an old pair of shoes, master?"

"Wife! Wife!" Denny exclaimed sharply, "I've no wife!"

Smilingly, he took the query as a compliment to his freshness. Wheeling away, he cocked his head sideways like a fox terrier. On many occasions he had tried to imagine what it would mean to have a woman in his cottage. But then he thought that perhaps, if he got married, the white cat would never again squat on the public house window. So each time it arose he firmly set the temptation of married life aside.

The tinker girl continued to watch the clerk.

Now or never was Denny's time to shoo her away. But as he turned to view her, her barely bridled eyes began to cry out at him. After staring at him coolly for a moment or so, she turned her head to look at his thatched cabin where it crouched at the left of the chapel gate.

Denny fussed about on the flagged chapel pathway. Loudly he knocked the end of the brush-head against the flags. He seemed anxious to tell the girl through loud noises, "How dare you glance away when the Parish Clerk looks in your direction?"

For all his antics the tinker girl was sitting motionless on her cart. Her very manner of waiting was indicative of concealed amusement. At last she condescended to look at him much as a mature woman would glance at the pleading-for-praise antics of a small boy.

Inconsequently, Denny shouted, "Nothin' for you today!"

The girl took her own time about replying. Then, "I want nothin' from you, master," she said softly. She did not draw upon the reins.

Now was Denny's second opportunity to say, "Be off!" Somehow the words refused to come. On a sudden thought he set his brush against the church wall and looked fully at her. She answered his eyes with frankness. They kept looking at one another for a long time.

She saw in him the never-ending adventure of safeness and respectability and security, of being a person of importance at the crises in the lives of country people—of being powerful at weddings, at births and at deaths; of being conversant with the wonder that was the Latin language, of having the first and the last of the

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whisky, of being able to speak up valiantly even to the teeth of the priest of the parish himself.

In the tinker woman the clerk sensed the adventure and wild delight of fairs and patterans, of curragh races and carousing and fighting and the unfettered singing of ballads.

He and she struggled to express through trembling thoughts the realization that each was complementary to the other.

The daring pact was readily sealed with their eyes. Denny donned his hat and as on a drowsy impulse walked slowly towards the chapel gate. To the clerk's ears lost rosaries clinked with unnecessary loudness and the hinges squeaked unfairly as the gate yielded to his hands. The sunlit village was sound asleep. The green shield of Ireland was prone below the summer hillock.

Pangur Bán had curled himself for sleep on the worn warm wall.

An unwonted tenderness glossed Denny's voice as he enquired, "Where are you headin' for?" Slowly the white gate latched shut behind him.

Before replying the tinker girl smiled. Then speaking quietly, looking at the white road ahead of her, she said, "Wherever the cob carries me." The smile faded slowly as her gaze swivelled to the whitewashed cabin at the right of the chapel gate. "Is that your house?" she asked, and again, "Is that your cat?"

"Ay! . . . Ay!"

The girl looked long at the little house with its tiny deeply recessed windows. She noted well the dark green half-door and over it the full door that had the stylish vagary of a shining brass latch marking it as the dwelling of a person of local importance.

The village continued to remain sound asleep.

"Do you never tire of the road?" Denny asked.

"Do you never tire of bein' fettered, master?" the girl flashed quickly at him, at the same time tossing a lock of her hair from off her forehead.

They both sighed fully and deeply. Under the black hat Denny's eyes had begun to smoulder.

As the girl secretly dragged on the rein, the cob shifted from one leg to another. This movement afforded her an alibi to utter an exclamation of annoyance. Her red and green skirt made a wheel of provocation as she leaped from the vehicle and advanced to make some obscure adjustment to the harness. As she headed for the open roadway her surety of carriage postulated that she knew that the clerk must follow. Uproad stood a hissing gander with his flock of geese serried behind him.

"The weather is better than gold!" Denny said lamely in the hope that she would dally.

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The girl did not reply. She prepared to lead her animal away. At the last moment of utter departure the clerk blurted as if conferring a desperate favour, "Hey, I'll convey you apass the gander!" The voice of his instinct had told Denny that all the woman needed in such a crisis was an excuse.

Still the tinker girl made no reply. Standing well away from the vehicle she began to make a great to-do about gathering up the reins and adjusting her shawl. Adroitly Denny moved to the far side of the road where he could speedily disown her if the necessity arose. Walking thus, apart yet together, they went out of the village and stepped downhill. Once the clerk glanced fearfully over his shoulder; the village was not so much asleep as stone dead.

The white road developed a wry neck and twisted away to where the houses and the hillock over them were unseen. The cob, a hairy, bony animal, moved smartly on the declivity so that Denny had to step it out bright and lively to keep up with the girl and her animal.

The splendour of the summer accompanied the pair. The countryside was a silver shield inclining to mid-day gold. Their footfalls were muted in the white limestone road dust. Muted also was the noise of the horse's unshod hooves. The harness, gauded as it was with a prodigious weight of brass mountings, had begun to wink furiously under the loud light. At last they came to where the road ran between level fields below. Here Denny looked over his shoulder and saw Pangur Bán fifty yards behind him walking stealthily on the road margin.

The parish clerk gave a sudden exclamation of annoyance. "Be off! Be off!" he shouted sternly at the cat.

Pangur Bán paused to utter a soundless mew. He then resumed the placing of two soft white clean paws in their accurate sequence. His down-drooping tail was a dead weight behind him. The brown wen on his white nose continued to precede him. Now and again the pink corrugated mouth-roof submitted itself to the scrutiny of a heedless world.

The girl smiled. Accompanied by the jingle of the harness they walked on. On a sudden thought Denny again turned. His angry face was red and suffused with blood. "Be off with you, you Judas!" he shouted. Stooping down he took up a stone and flung it fully at the cat.

The instant the stone left the clerk's hand, Pangur judged that it was going to miss him. So he remained utterly without movement. When the stone had gone singing away into silence the cat went over and smelled at a piece of road metal the bounding stone had dis-

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turbed. There was no smell of man from the metal. The white cat mewed his mystification into the cloudless sky; then passed faithfully on.

The road, a second time, unpredictably twisted until it commanded and was commanded by the road entrance to the village on the hillock.

The tinker and the clerk had now reached a point where, in a cornfield at the left hand side of the road, the ripening corn was green and olive and gold. The field was a small treasure house of sunlight with its span open to swallow the goodness of the southern sky. Directly beside their boots was the temptation of a gap descending to the sown ground below. The cob, as if dully conscious of their dilemma, stopped here and began to crop the grass of the roadside.

"The corn is swingin' into ripeness!" the clerk said. The girl halted and looked at the cornfield.

"Let us sit in the sūn," the parish clerk then ventured, at the same time diffidently indicating the remote corner of the field below. He dared not say more lest his voice should break off into nervous flakes.

The girl smiled her dreamy acquiescence. With slow movements that seemed to postulate that she had all the time in the world at her disposal she tied her cob to the butt of a whitethorn bush. Then the pair walked by the side of the cornfield and demurely took their seats on the grassy edge of the farthest headland. Here the corn screened them from the view of a person passing on the road. The fierceness and lushness of growth in this sun-trap had rendered the hedge behind them impenetrable. With rare bravery Denny at last took the girl's hand in his and began to fondle it modishly. As he did so he kept his face averted. Clerk and tinker seemed wholly content with one another's company. The sun beat upon them and drew frost-points of sweat from Denny's agitated face.

Twice already, from the top of the grassy fence, Pangur Bán had stretched out an exploratory foreleg in the essay of a descent into the hot cornfield. On each occasion concealed thistles and thorns tipping his pads dissuaded him from leaping. Ruefully the cat eyed the cropping horse, then turned to mew his upbraidings into the conversing wheat. Receiving no satisfaction therefrom he settled himself patiently to wait.

Pangur Bán sat with his generous tail curled around his front paws. His eyes were reluctant to open before the sunlight. On the infrequent occasions that they did so there was visible in each globule of green eye a slim upended oval of dark pupil. Whenever the eyes were fully closed the ears continued to sift the natural sounds of the day. One ear possessed the notable facility of moving

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and focusing and flattening whilst the other remained utterly still. At times the ears were flattened backwards on the cat's poll before the onset of a small breeze.

Reading his Office, the huge old priest walked the village. Glancing up from his breviary he noticed the brush idle against the chapel wall; his sharp eyes also spied the wire mat which was almost concealed on the lawn grass. The impudent valour of the gander the priest demolished with a stern wave of his blackthorn stick. Then standing in the road directly opposite the doorway of Denny's cabin, he sang out sharply, "Denny! Denny!"

Receiving no reply he shuffled to the chapel door and again trumpeted vainly for his clerk. At last with an angry, if not renunciatory, shrug of his shoulders the priest strolled downhill and out into the open country.

After he had walked for a while he could not help observing the blaze that was the brown and white pony and later still the flame that was the cat where it burned motionlessly beside the olive dropcloth of the cornfield.

Straight away the old man's face became crinkled against sunlight and puzzlement both. With clarity he recalled having heard some short time before the irate voice of his housekeeper raised to chase a young female tinker out of the presbytery kitchen.

"Away with you, girl," Old Nonie had shouted. "Fitter for you to do an honest day's work instead of stravagin' idly on the Irish roads!"

The priest's grunt indicated that he was versed in deduction. With a gait calculated to deceive a possible observer he began to slouch in the direction of the white target. His blackthorn stick was firmly imprisoned in his left armpit. From time to time his eyes strayed over the gilt edging and the coloured markers of his holy book.

Denny glanced up from his sober love-making.

"Divine God!" he exclaimed on seeing the black bulk approaching on the roadway above.

The clerk was inexplicably minded to cry. Meanwhile the girl was lying back on the grass: her posture had curved a swath of rich green hay to taut silver. She was smiling up at the sky as she spaced her clean small teeth along a grass stem.

Reaching the cat the priest halted. "Pangur! Pangur Bán!" he wheedled out of his mouth corner, the while his eyes roved over the cornfield. On hearing the known and loved voice, the cat tilted his exploratory back against the lower may leaves, set his four paws all together and then vouchsafed himself to droop for a bout of languid gaiety.

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For a moment or two the priest tricked with the cat. Then he straightened his back. " To think that I don't see you, Denny Furey ! " he clarioned into the cornfield.

Denny and the girl were prone and without movement. His agonized face was close to hers. About them the minute living world asserted itself in the snip of grasshoppers and in the tremulous love-noising of unseen birds.

Again the priest thundered, " Nice example for a parish clerk ! "

Slowly the sweat beaded above Denny's eyebrows ; one resolute drop gathered itself and sliding over the bridge of his nose raced into the volute of his right nostril. Despite the heat of the day the clerk's thighs had begun to shiver in the breeches his cat slept in. The girl's mouth was fully quizzical. She was able to see the priest through the altering lattice of the corn-heads, yet she failed to understand her companion's extreme agitation. Her own parish was a Province and that was a full quarter of Ireland. Allegiance and respect she owed only to the traveller's priest and he was well out of earshot a hundred miles away.

From the roadway came again the voice of retribution, " If it's the last thing I do, Denny Furey, I'll strip you of your black coat ! "

It was this very moment that a shrewish woman wearing a black and green shawl chose to thrust around the bend of the road as she headed resolutely for the village. This woman's interest in other people's affairs had kept her body lean and wiry. Long since spring green and summer red and even such loveliness as a cornfield in balance between two colours had ceased to possess an urgent message to her.

Catching sight of the woman approaching the priest quickly turned his face away from the cornfield and began to pace towards her along the road. He buried his face in his breviary and his lips began to move to the Latin.

When he had recognized who it was now on the scene Denny Furey first swore softly to himself and then began to cry without let. " The parish will be ringing with the news before dark ! " he complained through his tears.

The girl beside him was smiling in sureness and in silence.

Drawing closer the newcomer first blessed the priest so as to break him from his Office ; then in an eager voice that expressed threadbare concern she enquired, " Father, was it a thing I heard your voice raised ? "

The priest lowered his shaggy eyebrows a full inch. Then, " Sermons don't sprout upon bushes, my daughter," he said harshly.

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"Ah!" the woman breathed, "practisin' you were!" Then, as her crafty darting eyes alighted on the white cat, "Would it be bird-chasin' the clerk's cat is?"

The conversation of the wheat-spars was only one step above silence. The priest's eyes were like two old trout living side by side in a boggy stream.

Sagely the priest commented, looking fully at Pangur Bán as if seeing him for the first time, "It could be, woman, now that you mention it."

Pangur kept his eyes blissfully closed. He was utterly innocent of his intrinsic espionage.

The woman's third question came close to the bone. After prudently examining the cornfield and then flicking the spring cart with a single glance, she said, as if whispering in a crowded house, "People say, Father, that tinker girls 'd pick the very eye out of your head!"

This statement was akin to a darning needle driven home in a vulnerable part of the priest. The elasticity of his natural wince caused his voice to bound fully forward into denunciation.

"Did you never hear tell of the virtue of charity, woman?" he growled.

The woman made her crumbled excuses which it suited the priest not to accept. Hurriedly she walked away but not without an odd backward baffled glance. The priest stood angrily in mid-road ready to cannonade after her on the smallest provocation. Resentment and disappointment were implicit in the puffs of road-dust that spouted venomously from under her toecaps. Before the village swallowed her up she had the hardihood to look over her shoulder. The priest was standing still waiting to parry this backward glance.

For a little while the priest continued to eye the innocent cornfield. Then with a sound that was half grunt, half chuckle, he untied the cob and leading it by the head turned away in the direction of the village.

The instant the harness began to clash and the bell to rumble there was a moment of hesitation in the world. Then the tinker girl sprang to her feet and began to race wildly along the edge of the cornfield. "Father! Father!" she cried out. Despite the rough ground she raced upon, her shoes were sureness itself.

The priest came to a tolerant halt. The breathless girl stopped well out of the range of his stick. "So I've drawn you at last, my vixen!" the priest said.

In the midst of her rage and concern the girl found time to bob a half-curtsy. As again the priest turned to head the beast away,

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she turned berserk.

"What're you goin' to do with my animal, Father?" she shouted after him. With tinkers an animal and a cart are a treasure beyond treasures.

"Impounding him I am—unless you get that clerk o' mine out o' the cornfield at once."

The girl turned her wild eyes this way and that. Then, leaping on to the low fence, "Come out o' the cornfield, Parish Clerk," she shouted, "I want to recover my animal!"

After a while Denny shuffled to his feet. The cat stood up and mewed his master loyal greetings across the whispering corn.

The priest stood motionless at the animal's head. His dark old suit was set against the glitter of the harness. The angry girl stood on the fence, her arms akimbo: the anger that had been turned against the priest was now fully directed against the parish clerk. Shambling dismally, Denny came up to the road. Watching him out of cowled eyes, the word "hangdog" occurred with accuracy to the priest.

The girl again measured the firmness of the hand upon the ring of her cob's winkers. When Denny had come up she came to an informer's decision for she then blurted out in a high-pitched voice, "I was goin' my road, Father, when he coaxed me into the cornfield!"

Instinctively Denny opened his mouth for denial. Then his face assumed the attitude it always took upon itself prior to tears. He began to blink his moist eyes. He still kept his distance from the varnished stick that menaced him with its cream-coloured knobs and battered brass ferule. Slowly his mouth closed fast for he was too dejected even to rally to his own defence. Nothing seemed to matter now. Pangur Bán was rubbing himself resolutely against the end of the beloved breeches. The clerk quickly gave the cat the side of his long boot and sent him careering fully five feet into the bushes.

"A Cait, ou'r that!" he said, with a spurt of desperate courage.

The priest said loudly, "Aha, you scoundrel, can you do no better than abuse a dumb animal?"

Again the clerk drooped to the brink of desperation. Blinking furiously he turned his face to the cornfield. The cat had recovered himself in the long grass and was licking himself perplexedly.

Turning to the girl, the priest said, "Take your animal! And if I catch you in this village again, by the Holy Man above us both, I'll give you the length and breadth of my blackthorn!"

Boldly enough, now that she had taken full stock of the wryness of the situation, the girl taunted uprighteously, "He said he'd convey me apass the gander, Father!"

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She made several lunges forward before she mustered the courage requisite to grasp the winkers. Once indeed her buttocks winced away as she feared a blow about to fall. Then as she swung the pony downroad she continued to use the vehicle as a shield. When she had gained a few yards she leaped lightly on to the broad board on the side of the cart and slashed angrily at the pony's rump with the free dangle of the reins.

The vehicle softly rumbled and rang its way in the direction of the open country.

The priest, the clerk, the cat. The cornfield trapping all the sunlight the while its wheat-spars rustled.

"Come on, me bucko!" the priest said grimly.

He began to walk home. The clerk trailed after his master, a yard or two behind. Glory was gone out of his life and in him moroseness was king. The wonderful day seemed to have been created solely for his mockery. The future was a known road stretching before his leaden legs. What he had thought would prove a pleasant bauble in his life had turned to a crown of thorns. In the past whenever he had chafed against the uneventful nature of his existence always he had consoled himself thus, "One day, perhaps today, I'll run and buy me a hoop of bright colours."

Revelling in his misery he began to compare his soul to a pebble trapped in a wire mat of despair.

After the priest's anger had subsided, he gradually became infected with his clerk's moroseness. Side by side they continued to move homewards. From between faraway fields the sound of the harness bell was a recessional song of adventure diminishing into dusty distances.

Behind the priest and the clerk and at a discreet distance Pangur Bán travelled quietly. The white cat was undeflected by the soft wing-thrummings in mid-bushes. He continued to follow after the pair in accurate midsummer spurts. Now and again he paused to mew his loyalty into the sunny world.

* * *

FAUTE DE MIEUX

Comparatively few people care for art at all, and most of these care for it because they mistake it for something else.

ARTHUR SYMONS, in "The Savoy", 1896

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TARANTELLA

Of music, dance and bells

Orpheus, with his lute made trees,
And the mountain-tops that freeze,
Bow themselves, when he did sing :
To his music plants and flowers
Ever sprung ; as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring.

Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads, and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing grief and care of heart
Fall asleep, or hearing, die.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Henry VIII*

The Morris Dancers

Besides his adventitious finery, every dancer, of course, had in his hands the scarves which are as necessary to his performance of the Morris as are the bells strapped to the calves of his legs. Waving these scarves and jangling these bells with a stolid rhythm, the six peasants danced facing one another, three on either side, while the minstrel fluted and the dysard strutted around. That minstrel's tune runs in my head even now—a queer little stolid tune that recalls vividly to me the aspect of the dance. It is the sort of tune Bottom the Weaver must often have danced to in his youth . . . After they had drunk some ale, they formed up for the second dance—a circular dance. And anon, above the notes of the flute and the jangling of the bells and the stamping of the boots, I seemed to hear the knell actually toll. Hoot ! Hoot ! Hoot ! A motor-car came fussing and fuming in its cloud of dust. Hoot ! Hoot ! The dysard ran to meet it, brandishing his wand of office. He had to stand aside. Hoot ! The dancers had just time to get out of the way. The scowling motorists vanished. Dancers and dysard, presently visible through the subsiding dust, looked rather foolish and crestfallen. And all the branches of the Toryoldelin above them seemed to be quivering with indignation.

SIR MAX BEERBOHM, *Yet Again*

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Hey Nonny!

Hey, nonny no!
Men are fools that wish to die!
Is't not fine to dance and sing
When the bells of death do ring?
Is't not fine to swim in wine,
And turn upon the toe,
And sing Hey, nonny no!

When the winds blow; and the seas flow?
Hey, nonny no!

Author Unknown

Sweet . . . And Low?

I say of music, as Plato, Aristotle, Galen, and many others have said of it, that it is very ill for young heads, for a certain kind of smooth sweetness in it, alluring the auditory to effeminacy, pusillanimity, and loathsomeness of life, much like unto honey: for as honey and such other sweet conserves, received into the stomach, doth delight at the first, but afterward maketh the stomach queasy, and unable to receive meat of hard digesture, so sweet music at the first delighteth the ears, but afterward corrupteth and depraveth the mind, maketh it queasy, and inclined to all licentiousness of life whatsoever. And right as good edges are not sharpened but obtused by being whetted upon soft stones, so good wits by hearing of soft music are rather dulled than sharpened, and made apt to all wantonness and sin.

PHILIP STUBBES, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583

Carillon

Brief, on a flying night,
From the shaken tower
A flock of bells take flight,
And go with the hour.

Like birds from the cote to the gales,
Abrupt—oh, hark!
A fleet of bells set sails,
And go to the dark.

Sudden the cold airs swing.
Alone, aloud,
A verse of bells takes wing
And flies with the cloud.

ALICE MEYNELL, 1847-1923

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No Nightingales

Then we went to Jenny Lind's concert, for which a gentleman here gave us tickets, and at the end of the first act we agreed to come away. It struck me as atrociously stupid. I was thinking of something else the whole time she was jugulating away, and O! I was so glad to get to the end and have a cigar.

W. M. THACKERAY, *Letter to Mrs. Brookfield*, 1850

Pavane Chinoise

Subtly from slender hips they swing,
Swaying, slanting delicately up and down.
And like the crimson lotus flower
Glows their beauty, shedding flames afar.
They lift languid glances,
Peep distrustfully, till of a sudden
Ablaze with liquid light
Their soft eyes kindle. So dance to dance
Endlessly they weave, break off and dance again.
Now flutter their skirts like a great bird in flight,
Now toss their long white sleeves like whirling snow.

CHANG HÊNG, 78-139,
translated from the Chinese by Arthur Waley

Cancan

It was a strange dance; a sort of quadrille, with Valentin and the other men twisting their legs into uncouth shapes, making gross gestures with hands and arms opposite their partners, their partners in the attitude of Vishnu, one leg on the ground, the other raised almost vertically, previous to the sudden descent—*le grand écart*.

The most notorious of the women was La Goulue, an arresting blonde, short and plump, with a handsome, insolent face. She wore her yellow hair piled on top of her head, with a thick, low fringe and curling love locks, and a black ribbon tied round a full, strong throat. She was always bare-headed, while Rayon d'Or—surely a splendid name for a woman—tall and hard-featured, wore an enormous open-work hat on her bright red hair. Nini Pattesen-l'air was small and light on her feet; Grille d'Egout and la Mome Fromage were more than usually *canaille*, but skilful performers, while to me the single attractive figure was Jeanne Avril, called La Folle, a wild, Botticelli-like creature, perverse but intelligent, whose madness for dancing induced her to join this strange company.

SIR WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN, *Men and Memories*

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EPICURE'S ODYSSEY

Quite plainly a parasite has his duties

by GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

"I EXCHANGED," he used to say, "a foot for a stomach. I have no regrets."

He said it rather too often, perhaps, but that could be forgiven to so jovial and so excellently served a host. And it was true that he had no regrets. He looked contented. That, when you come to think of it, is a rare quality in our contemporaries: to look contented, to give out, even, a feeling of contentment.

The marked limp bothered him little—a deal less than if it had been caused by gout or any of the other ills that befall a man in his late fifties who has been generous to his body and allowed his soul to sit in at the entertainment. Devenor could afford to be generous. Between the wars Roumanian oil had so rewarded him that the loss of concession and capital equipment was more annoyance than disaster. He was the younger son of a younger son, but he had made more money than all the rest of his distinguished family put together.

"Twenty years of merry life," he would say. "Twenty years of near heaven. All very wrong by our present standards. All very immoral. I was most certainly a parasite. Ah, but a parasite has duties"—he chuckled with ironical self-satisfaction—"and the most important is to appreciate.

"To appreciate! Wasn't there a school of philosophy—in quieter days—which maintained that nothing could exist unless there were an observer to observe it? Well, there you are! The first duty of a parasite is to observe and enjoy. And if he isn't around to do it, there won't *be* anything to enjoy."

His Roumanian heaven had been in miniature, confined to a few thousand individuals of, by international standards, quite moderate wealth. They liked their women to be decorative and of a warm delicacy, and gave almost equal importance to their food. They were determined to enjoy the best of two traditions—the Parisian and the Byzantine.

Their supreme achievement, the seventh seal of their culture of the palate, was the Gradina Restaurant. It was unique. No

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kitchen in the world, Devenor insisted, could give such a variety of fare. Through its odd hundred years of life, the Gradina had collected the most self-indulgent recipes of three empires—the Russian, the Austrian and the Ottoman—and refined them by careful attention to French craftsmanship. In summer Devenor had placed his stomach and both feet—all heartily intact—under a garden table, where he could look up from lights and linen and silver into the cascading branches of a willow. In winter he had his corner seat near the entrance to the long, narrow dining-room that smelt freshly of tarragon and white wine.

The utility food of post-war London was hard to bear. It had deprived him, said Devenor, not only of nourishment but of ambition. What was the use of money when the utmost luxuries obtainable were an old goose or a slice of dead cow with the same gravy poured over both? True, he might have lived in Paris, but he had spent too many years in looking forward to retirement, his friends, his club and London, for him to return to exile gladly.

He dreamed of Bucharest as a man dreams of his once passionate enjoyment of poetry. Yet he was careful to distinguish the ingredients of regret—youth, freedom, women, food. Youth and freedom had gone beyond recall. Women—well, he had for them a tender and sentimental affection, as for a superb bottle that might at any moment be opened but had much better be left in the cellar to mature still further. There remained food.

For long he could get no news of his Gradina. Then at the club he met a diplomat, all fresh from his expulsion from Roumania, who told him that the beloved restaurant was reserved for workers' recreation.

Devenor, still living with his memories, was almost turned into a communist on the spot. To open that supreme flower of luxury to any of the masses who could appreciate it—that, if you like, was a justification of revolution. He said so, and his generous dream was instantly shattered.

"A tenpenny lunch, old boy. Soup and one greasy course."

Devenor used to swear that inspiration, there and then, had come to him. Very possibly it had. Shock is a stimulant. He retired behind his newspaper to think it out. What had happened to the Gradina's cooks—any of them who hadn't been commandeered for official banquets? Surely a Gradina cook must have the artist's horror of communism? Surely he would be glad to leave? Rescue was a duty.

From that moment in the club, Devenor, converted to the possibility of heaven, went at his task like any fanatical missionary. He saw the parallel.

"My intention," he said, "was to save two human souls from

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destruction. And I don't see that it matters a damn if one of them was my own."

He made no plans at all for his penetration of the Iron Curtain. It was impossible to make any. Roumania might be visited by students or delegates who were prepared to wait six months for a visa, but Devenor, a former oil magnate, would have to wait for a revolution. As for illegal entry, that no doubt was possible for some lean and hardened desperado. Devenor, however, was neither hard nor lean; he was only desperate. He hadn't had a decent meal in his own house for five years, and worse outside it.

For a start he flew to Istanbul. He did not confide his business to anyone, least of all to Roumanian refugees. He listened; he enjoyed his holiday; and never for more than ten waking minutes did he forget his objective. But he could take no action beyond the patient acquisition of large sums in Roumanian and Turkish bank notes. He considered himself, he said, entirely justified in breaking the currency laws of his own and any other country for so worthy a cause. After all, had he intended to rescue a scientist or politician, his illegalities would have had general approval. It was not his fault that government officials could not see the superior importance of a cook.

He tried out, in imagination, many a plan. Most of them involved crawling through barbed wire, for which he was quite unfitted, or jumping overboard in darkness, which he intensely disliked. He was perfectly well aware that he had to risk his liberty, but he wished to do so without avoidable discomfort. Finesse was his game, not youthful exercise. It was just a matter of waiting for an opportunity which would allow him to use his perfect knowledge of the Roumanian language and character.

He had to wait a month. Not idly, he insisted, not at all idly. Hotel bars, obscure cafés, frontier villages, the docks—he frequented them all as assiduously as any spy. Then, in the course of one of his morning patrols, he found on an unguarded quay, awaiting shipment to Constanza, the topmost section of a fractionating column. It was familiar, friendly, a section not only of steel but of his life. He knew the refinery that must have ordered it, the route it would take, and could even guess at the accident which had made so urgent its delivery.

This gigantic cylinder of steel was labelled and scrawled with injunctions for speed—speed in handling as deck cargo, speed in unloading, speed in railing to Ploesti. The very written word, "Ploesti", comforted him. Even in that tough and smelly oil town there had been a restaurant where the proprietor, if you gave him warning, would joyfully attempt the standards of the Gradina.

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To Devenor the cavernous, complicated tube was home. It wouldn't be the first time he had explored the interior of a fractionating column. And he knew its journey so well—twenty-four hours to Constanza and, in the merry evening of capitalism, not more than two or three days on the docks, provided his agent had dealt generously with customs officers and station-masters. These minor bureaucrats would certainly do a better job now—would rail the column at once to Ploesti in a real Roumanian panic, for fear of being accused of sabotage.

He admitted that it was entirely illogical to treat a strange section of fractionating column as an old friend, and that a journey inside it was likely to be just the sort of adventure he wanted to avoid. Still, there it lay—about to be transported into the heart of Roumania like a prince's private railway coach. It was even divided into compartments by the bubble trays, with, as it were, a corridor down the middle.

Devenor bought an inflatable mattress and a hamper of nourishing food. He entered the column through the manhole in what would be the top when it was erected at Ploesti. The hole was large enough to admit his stomach, but too small to light the recesses of the interior, the forbidding labyrinth of trays and take-off legs and leads. The other end of the section was shored with timber and effectively plugged.

He took only water to drink. He prided himself on that. It was proof of a disinterested missionary spirit.

"I thought," he would say, "that in the heat I must expect as deck cargo even wine and water might reduce efficiency."

It *was* hot. He chose a part of the column which was shaded by wood and sacking, but he could not avoid the heat of the Black Sea sun on steel. He had lost pounds in his Roumano-Turkish bath when the cranes lifted him off the deck and dropped him on to the waiting railway truck. The drop was uneven. He used to protest, with professional indignation, that the fools must have strained every joint in the section.

He anchored himself firmly in his corner seat between bubble tray and take-off leg, while the great flat-car was violently shunted up and down the yard. At last he felt himself moving purposefully in one direction, and relaxed upon his mattress with all the self-satisfaction of a traveller who has successfully cheated the customs.

"But I was frightened," he admitted. "Yes, sheer panic underneath. There wasn't a minute when I didn't wish I had stayed in London. Still, when the train started, I couldn't help feeling proud of myself."

He looked cautiously out of the manhole. The flat-car was at

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the tail of the train with only the caboose behind it. On the platform of the caboose a sentry was settling down to sleep. He was glad to see that the Roumanians still posted the idle military on trains to prevent pilfering. It was a comforting reminder that the national character had not changed.

The train rumbled over the Danube, and idled across the starlit Walachian plain. Whenever it halted, Devenor, kneeling at the manhole, heard the dear sounds of his second homeland: the barking of dogs in distant villages, the sigh and swirl of the streams past their willows, the croaking of frogs. Frogs fried *Colbert*—that was the way the Gradina used to do them. He dozed uneasily until shaken up by renewed shunting. When that was over, he could not resist deep sleep.

The discomfort of his own perspiration awoke him a little before midday. He poked head and then shoulders out of the top of the column. He was in the shadeless, dusty marshalling yards to the south of Bucharest. So long as he drew no attention to himself, there seemed no reason why he should not walk out into the city. He did so, greeting with an air of genial authority the casual groups of railway workers who were munching their loaves in the open doors of unloaded wagons.

Devenor did not want to show himself in the centre of the city. There were too many people who knew his face and liked it well enough to cross the road with outstretched arms and a whoop of welcome. His tentative plan was to get in touch, as unobtrusively as possible, with Traian, a former head-waiter of the Gradina and a staunch friend. He wandered through the suburbs until he came to a garden café, dirty and barren, but large enough to possess a telephone.

Traian no longer had a number, but there was one in the name of Devenor's godson Ion. He was not at all surprised to find that Ion had not only ridden out the storm but provided himself with an excellent address. As an irresponsible youth of twenty he had had a police record of dangerous socialism. True, his opinions were a pose, adopted merely to annoy his intolerably correct relations at court, but those of his set who could have given him away were dead or in exile. Devenor was prepared to bet that war and revolution had only changed his godson into an irresponsible youth of thirty.

"He treated me as if I'd just dropped in from the fields," Devenor said, "as if there were no reason in the world why I shouldn't be in Bucharest. He even sent his car round to the café for me. He just told me that of course he had a car—how the devil did I think he was going to live without a car?"

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Over lunch in Ion's luxurious flat, this show of idle riches was explained. Godson was an under-secretary—for he had always enjoyed yachting—in the Ministry of Marine.

Devenor asked him if he were a genuine communist, and got himself rebuked for indiscretion.

" My good uncle," Ion had said, " you really must learn not to ask such frank and English questions. Do you suppose I want to be shot by your venerable side ? "

The excellent lunch was entirely unreal. Devenor seemed to himself to have moved back ten years in time, and not at all in space. Bucharest was going on—at any rate in the flat of a government official—exactly as before. At street level the June air was thunderous as ever, and six stories up the geraniums of Ion's window-boxes stirred in the light breeze. Devenor's favourite white wine was on the table and cool in the decanter. There were rather less cars on the boulevard below and paint was needed and the inhabitants were shabby—but no shabbier than in the early nineteen-twenties.

" I couldn't believe it was possible to be shot," Devenor would declare. " It was just as improbable as my godson being a communist under-secretary."

Over the coffee he explained how he had arrived in the country and why. His godson followed the story with irreverent laughter and keen questioning. Then, at the end, he asked the most devastating question of all.

" Uncle John," he said, " how many of us would it hold ? "

Devenor couldn't understand that at all. He asked Ion why in the world he should want to go to Ploesti by fractionating column instead of by car.

" Not Ploesti, uncle. Turkey."

" It isn't going to Turkey."

" But why shouldn't it ? "

Godson Ion accused him of becoming intolerably insular, of wholly underrating the lively genius of the Roumanian character and the powers of the people's ministries. He ordered his godfather back to the column, insisting that it was by far the safest place for him, and told him to keep quiet and see what happened.

" But I want to see Traian."

" You leave it all to me."'

Devenor disliked leaving anything to any Roumanian, and especially to his godson ; but there was really nothing else to do. Godson sweetened the pill by giving him an imposing badge for his lapel, a basket of food and drink, and a car to return him to the outer suburbs.

The badge aided bluff. He had no difficulty in returning to his

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comfortable and now well-furnished seat between the bubble-trays. About six in the evening he heard a good deal of fuss around the column. The curved plates transmitted the sounds of the outer world like a telephone receiver. He could not mistake orders, arguments, excitement and slapping-on of labels. At dusk a locomotive came to fetch the flat-car and dragged it ceremoniously—like, said Devenor, a choir-boy walking backwards before a bishop—along the loop line round Bucharest. The locomotive then steamed off, rocking and light-hearted, leaving the column on a remote siding in the middle of a belt of trees.

Devenor ventured out. He and his column were alone, except for the frogs and a nightingale, upon the soft Roumanian plain. There was just enough light to read the labels on the car. They were even more urgent, menacing and precise than before ; but the destination was Constanza instead of Ploesti. The waybill in its frame at the side of the car was resplendent with new red ink and rubber stamps.

" It was quick work," Devenor admitted. " They have plenty of energy for anything utterly crazy. But it looked to me as if my damned godson had consigned us both to the salt-mines. I very nearly cleared out."

He didn't, however. He got back into his refuge and had a drink from Ion's basket, and then another. The effect was to make him less disapproving when Ion and a friend arrived, and shoved two suit-cases through the manhole.

Uncle John was formally presented to George Manoliu of the Ministry of Mines, and was compelled by every convention of courtesy to refrain from saying what he thought. Indeed he found himself in the position of host, extending with proper flowers of speech the hospitality of his fractionating column and showing the two under-secretaries to their rooms between the bubble trays.

Godson Ion and George Manoliu spread out their blankets, and arranged a third compartment for the sub-director of Roumanian State Railways who would shortly join the party. Devenor began to think that his chance of escaping death or Siberia had improved. These two young men and the third to come—administering between them the refineries, the railways and the shipping of the State—obviously had the power to order the column to be returned to Istanbul, to move it at the expense of any other traffic, and to direct the same or another ship to stand by at Constanza to load it. And from what he knew of Roumania, communist or not, he was certain that the respective ministries wouldn't catch up with what had happened for the best part of a week.

He said that while they were waiting for the sub-director of railways he would see about his cook.

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"Don't bother, Uncle John," Ion assured him. "That's all arranged."

Devenor hoped that it was; but the more he considered the character of his godson, the more sure he was that in the excitement of organizing his influential colleagues there could have been no time for a visit to Traian or the Restaurant Gradina.

Ten minutes later the sub-director of railways arrived, with no baggage but a bottle and what looked like an official cash box. He announced that in another hour they would be on their way to Constanza.

"And my cook?" Devenor asked again.

"Look here, Uncle John, we'll write for him," said Godson Ion.

Devenor crawled out of the manhole, and from the safety of the outer air addressed the under-secretaries. He told them that he was going to get his cook, that if they wanted to stop him they would have to catch him among the trees in pitch darkness, and that if they left without him he would go straight to the political police.

"They're still accustomed to foreign exploitation," he would explain. "There was nothing, really nothing, that they could do with a determined Englishman in a temper. No doubt they would be equally helpless with a Russian."

Ion explained the fanatical resolution which had brought his godfather to Bucharest. His two friends were delightfully sympathetic, enthusiastic indeed. This penetration of the Iron Curtain merely to obtain a cook appealed both to Roumanian pride and Roumanian love of a jest. A plan swiftly emerged from committee. It was for Ion and his godfather to call on Traian—who was still alive, and whose son might be the very man for Devenor—and then to catch the column in the marshalling yards or anywhere along the line to Constanza.

Fortunately the trust of the three functionaries in one another was not so great that they had entirely burned their boats. Each of them had kept a car and driver waiting on a dirt road, beyond the belt of trees, all ready for swift return to Bucharest in case of accident or treachery. Mines and Railways now dismissed their cars, and returned to the column in high spirits. As soon as the road was clear, Devenor and his godson drove off in the third car.

Traian had been the head waiter at the Gradina for twenty years, and had retired shortly before the war. If Devenor had known his address, he would, he said, have gone to see him at once, and left his damned godson to the inevitable end of his career as a commissar. Traian was a man you could trust. In all the years of his highly civilized trade he had never lost his peasant integrity.

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He lived exactly where he ought to live: in the old eastern suburbs of Bucharest, where the streets of white, single-storied houses preserved something of the character of an untidy and once prosperous village. At the back of a yard, where the dusty earth just kept alive a tree, a few flowers and a couple of hungry hens, they found Traian sitting under the eaves of his house in the melancholy idleness of the old. He looked ill-fed and disintegrating; otherwise he was the same Traian who had hovered for twenty years at Devenor's shoulder, whose middle-aged wedding Devenor had attended (and attended for a full riotous fourteen hours), whose retirement had been put beyond the reach of poverty by the subscriptions of Devenor and his friends.

Traian and Devenor embraced with tears in their eyes.

"And why not?" Devenor insisted. "Why not? Hadn't we known each other at our best and proudest? We embraced the splendour of our past manhood."

The old man—aged by undeserved and unexpected hardship rather than years—had no fear of godson Ion. To him gilded youth, whether it was communist or whether its cheques were frequently returned to drawer, was gilded youth. He talked freely. His wife was dead. His son, Nicu, trained in the kitchens of the Gradina and destined—for the Gradina thought in generations—to be the next chief cook but one, was working in a sausage factory. Traian himself was destitute. He could no longer be sure that he even owned his modest house.

"The tragedy of communism," said Devenor, "is that the State won't help those who can't help themselves. Even so Traian wanted me to take his son. Yes, at an hour's notice. Nicu was asleep inside, before going on the early morning shift. Yes, he begged me to take his son."

Devenor, of course, turned the offer down flat. There couldn't be any question of taking Nicu's support away from his father. Like a couple of old peasants, they talked the problem out unhurriedly, with many mutual courtesies, while the precious minutes of the night slipped away. Godson Ion fumed with impatience. He told Devenor not to be a sentimental fool. He told Traian not to spoil the boy's chances. He was remarkably eloquent in pointing out that there was no future at all for Nicu in Roumania, or for any man of taste and ability who hadn't, like himself, had the sense to join the party.

Meanwhile Traian's voice was growing firmer, and the ends of his white moustache began to twitch into life. Devenor remembered that Traian was only sixty-eight; he decided to take the responsibility of abducting father as well as son. He felt, he said, damnably ashamed of himself for shifting such fragile cargo, but, after all, that

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well-fitted steel cylinder was little less comfortable than a Roumanian third-class coach. He ordered Traian into the column regretfully and decisively, as if he had been sending back a *Chateaubriant* for another five minutes on the grill.

"And look at him now," Devenor invited, "when he brings in the brandy! I have to let him do something, you know. Oh, and he'll take a glass with us, too—but I can't make the old fool sit down to it when there are guests."

Traian's son was collected straight from bed, and packed into the car. He had no objection to any change, however immediate and revolutionary, so long as it took him out of the sausage factory and included his father. He was on his way to the marshalling yards before he had really got clear of a nightmare that he was making his palate into sausages; his palate, he said, had appeared to him as a large, white lump of lard.

The column had left for Constanza. So insistent were the instructions of Railways, Mines and Marine that the yard-master had presented it with a powerful, fine locomotive of its own. That fractionating column was going to be on board by dawn, all ready to be returned with ignominy to the corrupt capitalists who had sold it. The yardmaster expected a pat on the back from the Ministry. No doubt, when he got it, it was a hard one.

Ion's driver did what he was told without question; he knew what happened to an under-secretary's chauffeur who talked out of turn. They crossed the plain like a pair of headlights on the wind, but always the column kept a little ahead—for at intervals they had to bump over rutted country roads to the railway, or show Ion's credentials to saluting police.

They caught up with their flat-car at last, halted in the sidings before the bridge over the Danube and now with a train at its tail. A more awkward place couldn't have been found for a return to the safe recesses of the column, but they had no choice. It was their last chance, the absolute last chance. One side of the cylinder was flooded by the arc lights of the yard, as if some monstrous camera were about to take a farewell picture of it; on the other side was much coming and going of officials and of the sentries who would ride every truck across the Cernavoda bridge.

Godson Ion told his driver to return to Bucharest if he did not come back in half an hour. He did not seem unduly alarmed.

"Of course he wasn't! Of course he wasn't!" Devenor crowed indignantly. "That dam' pup had a perfect right to go wherever he wanted. As for the rest of us, we were just a problem to be shelved."

In ten minutes Godson returned for Nicu, who went with him unwillingly. But there was no object in protesting against Ion's

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plans; he controlled their fate. Devenor didn't know what he intended, and couldn't make head or tail of his explanations; he was only rendered thoroughly suspicious by a lot of high-flown nonsense about the young clearing the way for the old.

Traian and Devenor occupied a patch of darkness whence they could watch both the car and the column. They saw the two shadows of Ion and Nicu dive under the train. Shortly afterwards they saw the sentries posted. They waited for five more anxious minutes. Then the train started, and they watched its red tail-light swaying down the track towards the bridge and the impassable Danube.

After a journey of two hundred yards the train stopped. Devenor was so angry that he marched Traian straight up the line after it. He intended, he said, to get hold of the sentry and consign the whole heartless bunch of under-secretaries to Siberia, even if he had to endure their company on the way.

The sentry was on the platform of the flat-car, just outside the manhole. He was hidden from his fellows by the bulk of the column and the tender of the locomotive. Within the column there was the silence of steel; there couldn't be anything else from the moment the sentry was posted. That excused Nicu's behaviour. He dared not make sound or protest for fear of getting his deserted father into incalculable trouble with the police.

It was sheer anger which gave Devenor his inspiration. He informed the sentry that a man was hiding in the fractionating column, and told him to winkle the fellow out with his bayonet while he kept him covered.

"I knew my Roumanian soldiery well enough to risk it," Devenor said. "An air of authority. A little mystery. And they'll do what you tell 'em. There was the badge, too, in my lapel—that seemed to impress him. I can't tell you what it was. I meant to ask Ion. But thereafter I was rather painfully occupied."

As soon as the sentry was inside, Devenor put his head and shoulders after, and gave his orders. They were obeyed on the instant, and with only one quick rumble of sound. That unfortunate sentry—no, no, now living peaceably in America—was buried under desperate politicians leaping from the corners of the bubble trays. Then Devenor told his graceless godson to put on the sentry's uniform and take his place on the platform.

"Dam' play-actor! He stayed on guard till the cranes hoisted us off the Constanza waterfront, without anyone suspecting him of worse than obstinacy, and then managed to slip inside. That was that. They discharged us on to a deserted wharf at Istanbul, and all seven of us just walked out through the gates. Or, rather, six of us walked. I was carried by Nicu and the sentry."

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At this point it always pleased Devenor to expand and beam and wait for questions.

"No," he would answer, "nothing dramatic—no police, no bullets! Just sheer clumsiness. After the sentry had been nobbled, Nicu came out on to the platform of the flat-car, and I got down in order to pass Traian up to him. It was a bit of a strain on us two old gentlemen, and I couldn't pull my toes clear of the wheel when the train started. Nicu grabbed, and pushed the rest of me inside the column; but all the medical supplies we had were oil and wine like the good Samaritan. Well, at my age a foot is far from a prime necessity. But Nicu! Don't you agree that for me, without him, now, life would be inconceivable?"

* * *

PETS' CORNER

Bird, beast, fish—all somebody's darlings in literature. Allow one mark for recognising the pet, one for the source and one for the author, making 27 in all. The answers are on page 143.

1. *With this faithful animal it was a case of "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be."*
2. *I thought he was a myth till he turned up on a shelf in St. Louis.*
3. *This little creature was no courtier, though she knew how to delight an Emperor.*
4. *A wife persuaded her husband to give her this animal because of its beauty. But was she really thinking, "You scheming beast!"?*
5. *As a* dumb *animal he was charming, but his conversation was decidedly catty.*
6. *The feminine ending spelt tragedy for this remarkably good-natured—but, we fear, hypothetical—pet.*
7. *In twelve days she grew to regard her master as a god, but she still made him feel an ass.*
8. *Much larger than life yet mostly invisible, women hated to be introduced to him.*
9. *Somebody's pets, these two angel forms, but the end as far as Selima was concerned.*

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A BELT FOR CHARLIE

"Take it easy, mate," he said, "the snake won't be around for long"

by JOHN GREENWOOD

CHARLIE BLAKE and I had been together on several different ships before we joined the *Matura*. We were both from Merseyside—same school as a matter of fact—and it seemed natural to go looking for a new job together when our leave was finished. He was about my age; spent his money on much the same things. I suppose we were very much alike. The main thing was, we got along well together. You need someone like that aboard a ship, where you not only have to work with a crowd of men, you have to live with them too.

There was one interest we didn't share, though, and that was Charlie's fondness for pets. Anything that could fly, walk or crawl, seemed to interest him. I had seen him keep all the usual stuff at different times; canaries, monkeys, parrots, all the things you see peddled on the waterfronts the world over. He would go daft over them, handling them and making more fuss than a woman with a child. And yet in some ways he could be quite callous, especially after he had been keeping them for some time and his first fancy was over.

Myself, I don't mind a dog, but that's the finish. The rest of my company I prefer on two legs, and plenty of that on high heels.

You might think it strange that we could get along sharing the same cabin. But actually I didn't mind these things around; they just didn't interest me, that's all. The snake was different—I was more than interested then.

The *Matura* was one of the new ships Dunlays had built since the war, and she was doing their usual West African coast run. That's a sticky run, but she was fitted out to keep her as cool and comfortable as possible. The cabins were first-rate; two bunks in each, with mosquito screens and electric fans. The best fitting of all was a forced draught system that blew cold air along a little trunk into each cabin and kept things really sweet. She was a first class hotel compared with some of those old sweat boxes you can still see running around the tropics.

After we had discharged our outward cargo at Freetown and

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Lagos, we were creeping round all the small creek ports to load. Palm kernels and groundnuts were the bulk of it, and in some places we only lifted a few hundred tons. We would finish off at one of the larger ports when our draft got too deep to navigate the creeks.

Burutu was one of these creek ports, about twenty-five miles inland, where there was barely enough water to turn the ship around. So far as we could see, it consisted of the wharf and the canteen on the end of it, where you could get a reasonable bottle of beer. There was a native compound a short distance from the wharf, but none of us were hard up enough to try any of that.

It was in Burutu that he got the snake.

Most of the crowd were in the messroom that night; there was a game of solo going, and we were bunched round the table watching the play. Charlie had gone ashore earlier on, but I had decided to let it go that night, and there I was, drinking tea with the rest. It's funny how you can go for a cup of tea, even in the hot weather.

It was quiet in there, with everyone watching the cards, and although I was aware that Charlie had come into the room, I got as big a shock as anyone when the length of that snake was suddenly dangled over the kitty.

"There you are boys," said Charlie, "how's that for a piece of local talent?" He gave it a little shake so that its body arched and the head came up.

The effect was one big scatter. Cards and money went all ways, the men trying to get well clear of Charlie and the thing he now had draped round his neck like a coloured scarf. Some could reach the door, and the others were up on the stools in the far corner. Charlie had the centre of the room to himself, and nobody had enough breath left to curse him.

We found it soon enough, though, and the cursing was full and free. Charlie just laughed; he was flushed with the beer and excitement, and you could see he was enjoying the funny side of the whole scene. Our nerve came back too, seeing Charlie handle the thing so unconcernedly, and the others were soon around him, feeling the weight of it, and asking where he had got it. They didn't really find the thing repulsive, it was only the suddenness that had them all running. When that had passed, they could laugh with Charlie at the huge joke. I was over the first shock too, but I still only looked at the snake.

It wasn't *very* big, not much over five feet, and about the thickness of a boy's wrist. The general colour was a greyish blue, but this was shaded from the dirty, sickly white of its belly to a line of deep blue that ran along its back. There was an oily sheen to

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it that made the colours glisten under the light.

Its body tapered to the tail, but the head seemed large and flat, and out of proportion, as if it were made for a larger body. The line of its mouth was long, and here the skin was puckered slightly, and of the same dirty white colour as the belly. It didn't appear to open at all, but now and then a long tongue would slide slowly out and in again.

There seemed to be hardly any life in it; the eyes never uncovered, and that tongue was the only sign. But I thought it was the most repulsive thing I had ever seen. I don't know how you feel about snakes, but the look of them and the heaving way the flesh moves make me feel sick.

Charlie had seen the way I was looking.

"What's the matter, Jim?" he said still laughing. "Don't you fancy our room mate?"

I got excited then, and started telling him how quickly they would both go if he brought the thing near our cabin. After a while I saw it was no use talking. He was pretty full and could only see it as one big joke.

"Here you are, mate," he said, thrusting the snake towards me. "Dump it over the side now."

Then he laughed again, as I stood there looking at him. We both knew I just couldn't take hold of the damn thing, not even to dump it.

I suppose even a drunk could see how sick I was feeling.

"For the Lord's sake, take it easy, mate," he said. "It won't be around for long, not in this state anyway. Tomorrow I'm going to work on it and make the slickest belt you ever saw. I must try and keep the shine in that blue—it will look real good with my grey suit."

He looked at the snake admiringly and then once more draped it across his shoulders.

"I'll put it in the bottom of my locker for tonight," he said, "—it can't harm you there." He looked round the messroom and grinned. "Say good-night to the boys, my beauty." Then he went out and I sat down and managed a weak grin.

One night wasn't so bad. I knew I wouldn't sleep in the cabin, but I would be comfortable enough with my mattress and a sheet up on number five hatch. Many of the crowd made their beds on the hatch every night while we were in the hot weather.

After a while I went down to the cabin to collect my gear. Charlie was asleep by then, lying easily, flat on his back the way he always slept, naked except for the sheet drawn across his middle. I looked round carefully, but there was no sign of the snake and the locker door was closed.

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There was still no sign of it when I went down the next morning, but this time the locker door swung half open. It must have been only pushed to, without the catch being put on. Charlie was awake, and I looked on while he searched the cabin, lifting and peering, but it wasn't there. We searched all the quarters after that, but there was no trace. I felt uneasy; I was thinking of those air trunks leading into every cabin in the ship, and especially of the one that ended over our bunks! I knew my imagination was too vivid to let me get much sleep lying beneath that.

Later in the day I got a hammock rigged up, and from then on I slept up on the open deck every night.

We were completely loaded and on our way back to Liverpool before anyone saw the snake again. By that time the weather was cooler, and I was getting a lot of kidding about sleeping up on deck all the way home. But there was no kidding the pantry boy when he came running for Charlie—the poor kid was scared stiff.

"In the store room," he cried, "behind the sugar bags. It's twice as big now."

I dashed along with Charlie, I wanted to see the end of this thing. But it wasn't the end. We went through that store room without seeing or hearing the movement of any living thing, and at the finish we both stood looking up at the air trunk.

"I guess that's it," said Charlie; "it will be out again and I'll have my belt yet." He still thought of it only as a belt! I couldn't find anything to say.

It was cold that night and I was awake early in the morning. I could hear the boy in the messroom, getting the tea ready before he called us. It was still dark when I went down to our cabin, and I had opened the door and stepped in before I switched on the light. I didn't go any farther.

The bunks were facing me, and I could see Charlie stretched out flat as usual, with his arms by his side. But his eyes and mouth were wide open, and his face was puffed up into a rotten bluish colour. Twined round his neck like a muffler was the snake. Its flat, ugly head lay close by his ear, the eyes were still covered, but while I watched, that tongue slid slowly out and in again.

I left in a hurry for the bathroom then. I knew I was going to be sick. The pantry boy had been right; it was much bigger.

* * *

Work is the curse of our drinking classes.

OSCAR WILDE

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TROUBLE WITH THE UNION

"Little use of *me* to tell them we have a gang of bricklaying angels on the pay roll," said O'Mara

by DENNIS HARRINGTON

A FULL moon shone on Brooklyn, but only a cynic would say it shed its light indifferently on rich and poor and good and bad alike. Over the lovers in the park, it diffused a deceitful radiance that turned warts into dimples; it camouflaged the scrawny yard at the back of the tenement where Mrs. Donahue lived and tipped a neighbourly wink at the old lady herself as she sat by her kitchen window soaking her tired feet in a pan of hot water; but into the courtyard of St. Damian's High School for Boys it poured the full power of its harsh beam and, like a spotlight at a police line-up, pointed its questioning finger at a man who was creeping stealthily across the garden towards the tangle of steel framework and scaffolds of the newly begun school building.

The baleful figure pursuing this silent way was Brother Aloysius, and on him the moonlight didn't look good. It masked him with black eye sockets, pulled his rough-hewn nose down an inch or two, pointed up corners of a craggy brow into a pair of horns and gave him an evil companion in a shadow that magnified his cunning by copying each crafty step with exaggerated mimicry.

Now, by all the rules under which he lived, this was truly a strange performance for Aloysius to be giving at this hour. Were he a priest of the community stealing off to a secluded corner to ponder his next Sunday's sermon or a lay brother savouring the small pleasure of a late pipeful after a long day of chores in the kitchen, he might have reason to be abroad in the moonlight, but Aloysius, as a teaching brother of the Order of St. Francis, should have been in his tiny cell, fast asleep on his hard pallet an hour ago; morning prayers at four o'clock scarcely encourage night prowling.

Yet here he was, like some conspirator from the very mediæval history that he taught five days a week, working his sandalled feet cautiously over the rubble that littered the ground around the new building and carrying, so as to avoid any noise, an assortment of tools that might possibly be of use to a dynamiter, but were certainly not the usual accessories of a high-school teacher. In one hand Aloysius had a bricklayer's trowel and a spirit level, in the

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other a garden hoe, and tucked in the cord that clinched his long brown habit at the waist was a double-bitted adz. Occasionally the handle of the adz would tangle with the rosary that hung from the same cord and set the heavy crucifix and beads to rattling. Aloysius would stop, quiet the noise and peer around for any sign of detection.

On approaching the watchman's shanty, he paused, sighted out his path carefully, and then, with the caution of a Sioux, slipped across the lighted space into the concealing shadow of the building. He continued along the wall where the outer shell of brick was just high enough to shield his six-foot figure, turned the corner and picked his path along the whole length of the new direction to the far end. Here he stopped, lifted his head and searched anxiously along the top line of the brickwork where the end of the day's labour had left it, and smiled in great satisfaction.

With the full width of the building separating him from the watchman and with the near-by street noises to cover the small sounds of his activity, Aloysius went to work. He set his tools down between a cement-mixing trough and a pile of sand, tucked the long skirt of his habit up under the knotted cord of his waist, fished a bag of cement from a canvas-covered pile, led out a coiled-up hose that snaked off to a spigot near by, and, with his hoe as a shovel, started measuring out the ingredients for a batch of mortar.

If one has wondered where a humble teaching brother acquired the guile for that sly journey from the back door of the monastery, one would be even more intrigued at this latest bit of the night's performance, because in this Aloysius showed not only a skill that told of long practice but also a good measure of premeditation. It was obvious that he had cased the job. His movements were easy, his hands readily found what they sought—the handle of the water spigot, the ladder, the hods for cement and the brick.

In short order he was seated on the scaffold, with brick and mortar and tools ready for the night's mischief. But there he paused. At the point when the villain would have produced the stick of dynamite, when the honest labourer would have energetically started to light his pipe, Aloysius paused, humbly blessed himself, and began to pray.

His pause seemed long, so odd was the tableau, but it was only as long as three Hail Marys before he raised his head and picked up his trowel. Neatly cementing the end and flat of a brick, he began. Brick followed brick, course above course, like the prayers on his beads. Aloysius plied trowel and level and adz with the competence of a journeyman bricklayer until the shadows that had hidden his arrival climbed up the wall and blacked out the light by which he worked. Then only did he stop. For a moment he

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stretched his big arms and relaxed. With no less caution than he had begun the night, he climbed down from the scaffold, restored the hods, and ladder and hose, gathered up his tools and retreated across the courtyard to the monastery.

The moon set, the sun rose. Workmen arrived and students arrived, and it was on to noon before word of the nocturnal bricklaying crossed the courtyard and garden to the old school, although the violence with which it reached the office of Brother John, the principal, was enough to have carried it clear to Borough Hall. It was carried or rather projected ahead by the bellow of a bantam Irishman whose very bald head glistened with his anger. His arrival seemed to change the shape of the little office. A moment before, the room was tall and quiet and sparse, like the principal; now it bulged and puffed out and squatted to accommodate the round bustle of energy that surrounded the little man. The whole thing stopped seething only long enough to say, "Good morning, Yer Riverince."

"Good morning, Mr. O'Mara. Is there something wrong?"

"Something wrong, Yer Riverince; aye, there is that. I've called me men off the job."

"But why? What is it?" asked the perplexed Brother John.

"'Tis the dirty capitalist doings of the likes of him," said Mr. O'Mara, pointing a blunt leathery finger past the principal and out of the window at a young man running across the yard towards them. "To think that I've worked fur the likes of him." A tremendously aggrieved Mr. O'Mara felt the heavy burden of deception. A great sigh escaped him over his abused trust. His *r's* rolled wonderfully and his brogue was thickened with his lost faith in man. "Aye, Yer Riverince, man and boy, fur thirty-five years I've worked fur Hollahay's Construction Company. His father was as fine a builder as ever erected a convent or church. But the boy, ha!" snorted O'Mara. "'Tis the fine schools and the fine clothes and the fine idea fur him!"

With this as an introduction, a panting young man of about twenty-five burst into the office. His suit was undoubtedly more expensive and better cut than Mr. O'Mara's white overalls, and in truth, the only evidence he showed to connect himself with honest toil was an honest face and a little plaster dust on his good-looking tan shoes.

His greeting, however, expressed something of concern. "Good morning, Reverend Brother, have you had any luck—"

"Mr. Hollahay," broke in Brother John, with a slightly aspish edge to his rather pedantic address, "I should be very grateful for even a bare explanation of this dispute."

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"Yes, Mr. Hollahay," said Mr. O'Mara, with scorn born of conscious virtue, "tell His Riverince what a connoiving capitalist exploiter the only limb of Patrick Hollahay, Senior, has become."

"Oh, for Pete's sake, O'Mara, stop talking like an editorial in *The Daily Worker*." Then turning to Brother John, young Hollahay explained, "Tim here claims he found some brickwork on the north wall that his men didn't lay. He has some crazy notion that I'm trying to put on a scab gang at night to speed up the job and pick up the bonus for early delivery. He wanted to knock the brickwork out, and when I refused to let him, he called his men off the job."

"As 'tis me duty, me being the union delegate," said Mr. O'Mara.

"But why undo the work?" asked Brother John of both of them, and with some misgivings about where he would get pinched between the jaws of two belligerent Irishmen.

"Just to make work," Mr. Hollahay spoke bitterly. "We pay the highest scale in the borough."

"Oh, so that's it, is it? With jobs begging all over the city, O'Mara has to make work, does he? Well, 'tis the last day's work I'll do fur the likes of you, Mr. Hollahay."

"Wait, please, Mr. O'Mara," pleaded Brother John. "You mustn't stop work. You know how badly we need the new building. Our old school here is far over its capacity. If you stop, the other trades will stop, too, and the whole thing might be delayed so long that we couldn't open in the fall."

"Indeed I see that, Yer Riverince, and it's not to me liking either. When I get home the missus will give me the back of her hand. She'll call me a black-hearted divil, and she'll give me no more supper than would fill a canary, and say that fasting is good penance fur me sins in stopping the work."

O'Mara finished his speech with an angry look at Hollahay that plainly added this personal grievance to the professional wrong, already laid on the young contractor's doorstep.

"Isn't there some way of keeping your men at work?" persisted Brother John.

"There is that, Yer Riverince. Have Mr. Hollahay tear out his scab brickwork."

"O'Mara," said Hollahay through clenched teeth, "I'll brain you with one of your own ugly hods if you keep on saying that I laid those bricks."

"Oh, thin I'm sure it must have been the little people, the fairies!" O'Mara's sarcasm was thick with brogue. "Yes, the little people always come out of a full moon, and they like nothing better than taking a turn at bricklaying, especially fur the Hollahay Construction Company."

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Brother John strove to get the business back to an objective point by asking naïvely, " Can you actually tell your own work, Mr. O'Mara ? All bricks look alike to me."

" Well, that they would, Yer Riverince, you having what might be called an eye fur a book, but none fur the fine points of the trade. 'Tis all in the way a man handles his trowel on the mortar, and then we know where a man knocks off and how many bricks he laid that day."

" Yes, and it's about half an honest day's work," broke in Mr. Hollahay derisively.

" Please, Mr. Hollahay . . . Go on, Mr. O'Mara."

" Well, 'tis as I say. Now, this work last night, 'tis good work." Mr. O'Mara, honest workman that he was, could not let himself belittle even what he thought to be the scab product of a fellow craftsman. " But 'tis different, and then 'tis laid in a queer fashion."

" What do you mean ? " asked Brother John.

" Well, 'tis not run straight across the floor level, but only between two columns, like would come of wanting to put a wall in only one room."

" I see. And you both are positive that neither of you had that work done ? "

Both denied vigorously. Brother John was perplexed. The room was silent for a moment before he asked, " What room was to be located behind that wall ? "

For the first time since O'Mara had entered the office, he was gentle in his speech. " Well, now that you mention it, Yer Riverince, 'tis the chapel."

" The chapel ! " Brother John gazed over the heads of the two men at the bare wall behind them, then turned to the window and looked hard at the red-leaded steel columns and solid masonry foundation of the new building across the court. He stared hard and shook his head several times, as though trying to keep himself firmly tied to the present and the concrete. When he faced the two again, he seemed to have got hold of something that tugged him between a hope and a doubt.

He spoke to the younger man first. " What do you know of St. Francis ? "

" Well, he founded the religious order to which you belong, Brother John."

" Yes, yes, but I mean more detailed things." Brother John seemed impatient now, as though anxious to have his own thoughts corroborated by another's expression.

" Let me see. Oh, he was once a soldier," continued Mr. Hollahay, obviously becoming embarrassed by how much of the

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subject he didn't know and groping desperately, like an unprepared schoolboy. "And he liked birds and animals."

"But what did he do, himself, with his own hands?" Brother John was now almost pleading to have the thing he wanted spoken by this young builder.

"At first, I think he fixed up something, a house or a—no, I know . . . a church. That's it; he built the wall of an old chapel."

"Exactly. He built the wall of a chapel." Brother John spoke each word slowly, meditatively.

O'Mara, the real mystic of the three, seemed closest to the heart of the unspoken suggestion, and immediately put it into words. "Now, Yer Riverince, it wouldn't be that ye're saying we had a miracle like, here last night."

"No, no, Mr. O'Mara." Brother John disowned the idea, now that it was brought out into the cold light of day, but it was clearly apparent that that was just exactly what he meant.

"Calling such an incident a miracle is only an excitement to the credulous. Crowds gather for less, as you know, Mr. O'Mara, and they attribute supernatural significance to the most fantastic things. I'm afraid your men will noise the thing about."

"Aye, that they will."

"You must prevent a strike, then."

"Well, Yer Riverince, now that you put it in that light, I'll try, but it'll not be before tonight. The union'll have to take a vote on it."

"But, Mr. O'Mara, that will make things worse—having it openly discussed."

"'Twould be little use to try and hush the thing now, Yer Riverince. The Indians would only—"

"Indians, Mr. O'Mara!" Brother John's eyes widened. "Did you say Indians?"

"Aye, three of thim . . . And lately they're the divil's own limbs fur stewing about the rules. 'Tis vote on this and vote on that till every meeting is like a bloomin' powwow."

"But Indians, Mr. O'Mara!" The vision of a feathered redskin working on his new school with a trowel in one hand and a tomahawk in the other had Brother John floundering.

"Oh, they're good workmen, Yer Riverince, and good union men too; but someone has got their ear about their tribe coming from Rosshia. 'Tis a great journey our ancestors made across Siberia and the Bering Sea,' sez one of them to me. 'Tis a journey up that scaffold you better be making,' sez I."

"I can understand then that you might have some difficulty. What will you say to them, Mr. O'Mara?"

"Well, I thought you might do the talking."

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"I!"

"Yes, Yer Riverince. 'Twould be little use of me to tell them that the Hollahay Construction Company has a gang of bricklaying angels on the pay roll. 'Twould seem like the undoing of organized labour and 'twould be the last of O'Mara as a union delegate."

"Yes, I can see that," said Brother John, with a sigh of resignation at the task of explaining how a lot of bricks got themselves set into a wall by no known human agency, and that such things couldn't happen, but that such things, of course, did happen throughout the world every year, and when they did they might be miracles, but that this bit of handiwork wasn't at all a miracle and, of course, no one should mention it to his wife when he got home from the union meeting, because, you see, it's not really anything extraordinary. "Yes, I see," said Brother John. "Very well, I'll be there."

The bell was beginning to ring for the Angelus as the two now pacified Irishmen left the office. Brother John stood a moment in prayer before proceeding to the refectory where the brothers gathered for their silent meals. As usual, the last to enter was Brother Aloysius. As usual, he had been teaching class with no regard for time, and had found himself leading a charge of crusaders across the plains of Damascus when the bell rang to end the period. As usual, his brown habit—and this was his new one—looked less brown from its layer of chalk dust than any of its fellows, so that no one could have detected the sprinkling of cement that it had carried off from the preceding night's labour.

As usual, too, his homely face looked serene and guileless, and if any burden sat on his conscience, his bulging shoulders carried it with ease. Indeed, Aloysius appeared at peace with God and man. But it was a peace about to be rudely shattered, because Brother John wasted no time in preliminaries. Aloysius and his fellows were told that a strike threatened their new school and that the cause was a certain amount of bricklaying, the origin of which mystified the workmen, the construction company and Brother John alike.

At the first words Aloysius tried to speak out, but his tongue just stuck dry. For a moment as he listened he almost began to hope that he was actually not the one about whom Brother John was talking, because the principal, in simple faith that had no difficulty accepting miracles, made the night's feat look indeed superhuman. "... and the fence, no entrance except past the watchman. An amount of work equal to what two men accomplish in a day. Yes, my brothers, a very strange affair. I can't—Yes, Brother Aloysius?"

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Aloysius had at last found his tongue. "Reverend Brother."

"Yes?"

"I laid the brickwork last night."

The silence that followed was awesome. Poor Aloysius. There he stood at the plain board table that would have held his simple lunch, towering his six-foot bulk over his seated brothers, making an end to a dream he had nourished from the first moment he had heard of the new school. To emulate in little things so as to be ready for the big thing, the life of the simple Francis, whose footsteps he followed—that was all he ever tried to do. There was scarcely need of any questioning, since each man in the room knew all that was necessary for understanding the reason, but, after that build-up by Brother John, some explanation of the mechanics of this feat was demanded by honest, natural, everyday curiosity, from which brothers are no more exempt than bricklayers.

The questions were asked by the principal in a strangely gentle voice, and Aloysius answered. He was miserable at the disclosure. For the moment, his secret lost all its meaning and appeared almost like a juvenile prank, as he explained how he had studied the blueprint of the building, watched the pace of the work, and on the final night had borrowed the tools from the shed kept by Brother Joseph, the lay brother who mended and patched and did a general handy-man's work about the school.

"But the bricklaying," quizzed Brother John. "Mr. O'Mara says that it's good work. Where did you learn that?"

"Well, you see, Reverend Brother, I learned the trade before I entered the order. I was an apprentice, then a journeyman in Dublin, and after my mother died, God rest her soul, I paid my way through the university by working at it."

"And last night it appears that you did about twice the usual day's work."

"I suppose I expected to get a little better wage than the usual day's pay. Heaven knows, it was small enough when I was at work."

As answer followed answer, Aloysius began to have a feeling that something was wrong with the interrogation. The superior was beginning to be a shade too gentle, too meditative. Brother John was not a calculating man, but he had been through a disturbing morning and, now that they had all returned from the stratosphere to the prosaic level of economics, he found himself facing a distasteful duty of chastising his subordinate's impracticality without censoring the sanctity and childlike faith which inspired it.

"So you are rather well acquainted with the ways of labouring

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men, my son ? " said Brother John blandly.

Aloysius felt uncomfortable, but stood mute. Something was coming; he knew not what.

" Then perhaps," continued his superior, " you can accompany me tonight and explain yourself to Mr. O'Mara's union in a manner that will bring them back to work tomorrow. I think that is all. Shall we have our lunch now ? "

Aloysius found little relish in his food or in his classes that followed. The whole business of battles and ballads, of cathedral and castle and cloister that lived in his lectures and made mediæval history a bright hour in the shabby lives of the tenement youngsters who comprised his class—all of it was flat. He taught like a good mechanic, not like an inspiring master, for Brother John was right in surmising that Aloysius knew labouring men, and he was worried about the outcome of his evening's mission.

That night Aloysius and his superior found the union meeting assembled in the hall of a nearby school. The room was filled with gnarled-fisted men, each of whom bore the mark of his trade in a face that was filmed with a network of white treads, the ingrained dust of their day's work that no soap and water ever dug out. From the platform where they were standing, Mr. O'Mara and a keen-looking young man came down to meet the two teachers at the door. O'Mara introduced the union secretary, and then, in brief words, Brother John told of the findings that came to light at lunch. Mr. O'Mara, knowing what had been a possible explanation, heaved a gusty breeze of relief.

The old bricklayer had replaced his overalls with a neat blue serge suit and a white starched collar that made him look exactly like a master bricklayer dressed in a neat blue serge suit and a white starched collar. The secretary, on the other hand, wore a comfortably wrinkled tweed suit that would have been appropriate for any smart young man, from a committee member on his day off to a labour-union secretary on his day on.

He led the party on to the platform and called the meeting to order. With the last rap of his knuckles on the table, a man popped out of a seat in the front row, calling for the floor. He was lined with white like the rest, but on him it stood out in seams against a copper face. He bobbed up and down and jerked about with his hand in the air, signalling to the stage and looking for all the world like a marionette of Boris Karloff.

For some seconds the secretary tried to ignore him, but the gyrations wouldn't be ignored. " All right, Mr. Stalinovsky. What is it ? " asked the secretary.

" Comrade Stalinovsky ! " corrected the bouncing one in a

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vigorous voice. " Comrade, not mister ! I don't hold with these bourgeois titles ! We're all brothers ! "

The secretary cut off that speech smoothly by picking up a paper from the table and suggesting, " You wanted to vote on the last minutes ? "

" No—no ! " danced Stalinovsky. " I want to vote on a strike against the dirty capitalist exploiter, Hollahay Construction Company ! "

It sounded as though there was a list of accepted adjectives to be memorized, and always used when referring to the current employer.

" They put this scab labour on last night, and I say—"

" But that's not so ! " burst out Brother Aloysius, as he jumped up from his seat and advanced to the front of the platform. " I laid the bricks ! Mr. Hollahay knew nothing about it ! "

" You ! " exclaimed Stalinovsky. He, in turn, advanced towards the platform, tilting his head back more and more to look up at this redheaded apparition in the too tight suit that was obviously not a working man, but what was it ? The hall began to buzz. Men in the rear stood on seats to watch.

" You laid the bricks. Who are you ? "

" I'm a religious, a teaching brother. Please let me—"

But the comrade would have none of it. " Secretary," he shouted, " how did he get in here ? Don't you know religion is the opium of the people ? "

" 'Tis I who asked him," asserted O'Mara, joining the fray and also advancing to the footlights.

" You ! I knew it. We'll never have a dictatorship of the proletariat till we send the foreigners back where they came from."

" Furriners, is it ? " bellowed O'Mara. " I'll furriner you—you—" making a lunge to go over the edge of the platform at his tormentor.

He was collared in time by Aloysius, and held, sputtering out his wrath, while the secretary tried to outshout everybody with cries of " Order ! Sit down back there ! Shut up, Stalinovsky, or I'll suspend you ! "

When peace returned to the meeting, the contending forces occupied the same territory as at the onset of the engagement, but O'Mara and Stalinovsky sat glaring at each other, puffing like the lids of tea kettles just coming to a boil, while Aloysius stood with tilted head, listening to the sage counsel of the secretary.

" You'd better explain the business right now," he told Aloysius. " We'll postpone our routine affairs till this is settled. The men are in no mood for delaying."

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" All right," said Aloysius, " but I'm afraid it will sound like a weak sort of explanation."

" Well, just tell them exactly what happened. They're a little excitable tonight, but they'll listen."

Will they understand, though ? wondered Aloysius as he nodded to the secretary and made his way to the edge of the platform. He had time for only a murmur of a plea to the Blessed Mother before he found himself looking down on the expectant faces, seamed and old and young and hard alike. Then Aloysius began to notice the details—the neatly brushed hair, the meticulous old-fashioned starched collar alongside the clean soft shirt. These were working men whose horny thumbs would have felt at home in his own handshake. These were his kind of people. And he began to talk, not of mysteries, but about work.

He took them to a little Italian town of Assisi, where a special working man lived seven hundred years ago ; and with all the unconscious skill that made his classes inspired, he told them of Francis, not as a saint, but as a working man. They saw Assisi in its true colour and life—its guilds and churches and palaces. Not with Aloysius, but with Francis, they were hungry and cold ; they embraced a leper and begged for a crust of bread. Then they built. As Aloysius told his story, the ending was inevitable. They would have felt betrayed had they, too, not been asked to creep out that night and with their own hands build that chapel wall, with no touch of bargaining, but just as their own free, unheralded offering.

O'Mara ended the spell. He shattered the hush that filled the hall with a trumpetlike nose blowing. He rubbed his proboscis vigorously and dabbed a bit at his eyes and made a great play of being a very practical, unnonsensical fellow behind a bedsheet-sized red bandanna handkerchief. But Stalinovsky, unreconstructed rebel to the end, fighting as long as a single shot was left, wasn't to be taken in by a lot of sentimental eyewash. This time he rose quietly and began cunningly. This time he would demolish the whole claptrap with one telling blow.

" Does the union have a contract with the Hollahay Construction Company ? " he asked the secretary reasonably.

" Yes, of course."

" It calls for a closed shop ? "

" It does."

" And any work done on the job must be union work ? " said our dialectic materialist.

" Yes," said the secretary, granting a second premise.

" Then the work last night was scab labour because it wasn't done by a union man."

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As he nailed down his conclusion, Stalinovsky had the grace merely to raise a quizzical eyebrow. He was a gentleman; he didn't gloat; but his logic left the hall restless. It was embarrassed by this attack. The secretary looked inquiringly at Aloysius, who had begun groping frantically in his pockets. At last he found what he sought, and with a triumphant smile he pulled out a little black notebook. The hall waited in expectancy. Aloysius thumbed through its pages, dropping two dog-eared holy pictures and a tab from a brown scapular before he picked out a card and handed it to the secretary. The latter studied it closely and compared an identification picture it bore with Aloysius' own visage. A whispered conversation between the two followed for a few minutes.

The secretary stood up and, with something of a grin, announced, "Gentlemen, it appears that our visitor is a member in good standing of the Dublin branch of the building-trades union in Ireland. We are, of course, allied with them through fraternal bonds."

And then the hall roared. It laughed for ten minutes. This was what they loved.

There was no mood left for routine business. Aloysius now was a hero. Hollahay was a benefactor of mankind. Stalinovsky was routed.

But Stalinovsky had one last gasp. Jumping to the platform, he snatched the card from the secretary and glared at it. Angrily he pointed at the name it bore—"Sean O'Caillaigh." Ha, that was it—a dirty capitalist conniving exploitation. A barefaced forgery. Had the hall been quiet, he would have hurled the charge broadside. Instead, the frustrated rebel faced Aloysius and the now frankly laughing secretary. He couldn't speak; he could only point. Innocence outraged looked like that.

When enough quiet returned to permit his being understood, Aloysius explained, "It's my name before I entered the order—John O'Kelly, as you would call it. That on the card is the Gaelic spelling."

Stalinovsky still had a gasp left in him. "How can—how do you—what I mean—"

"Perhaps you wonder how it is that I'm a Franciscan and still a trade unionist? Well, the branch voted me a life membership when I entered the order. 'Twas a handsome gesture, don't you think?"

Stalinovsky had no reply; he had fired his last shot.

Aloysius saw that the evening held one bit of unfinished business, as he glimpsed O'Mara in the background still sputtering about "furriner" in between bursts of laughter. Holding out a hand to

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Stalinovsky, Aloysius said, "I hope we'll be friends, Mr.—er—Comrade Stalinovsky."

The comrade tried to ignore the extended palm, but it wouldn't be ignored. To be done with the thing he took it coolly, but then he felt the familiar calluses and the horny thumb of the trade. He looked up.

"You are a workman," he conceded to Aloysius. A smile began to soften his face. "What do you call yourself—brother?"

"Yes. Brother Aloysius."

"That's like 'comrade.'"

"Yes, it is a bit," admitted the newly elected comrade.

"That's a good idea, you belonging to the union," said Stalinovsky judiciously. "Does he belong to a union?" This with a nod at Brother John sitting composed, unmoving, as he had sat all evening.

"Well, you see—" faltered Aloysius. "Well, yes, I'd say he does." Then seeing his opportunity, Aloysius suggested, "Your friend, Mr. O'Mara, now he's a union man, a friend of yours."

"He's a foreigner."

"But yourself," persisted Aloysius, "where were you born?"

"Me!" exclaimed Stalinovsky. "Right here in Brooklyn, on Bushwick Avenue."

"Well, your parents, where do they come from?"

"Brooklyn, Bushwick Avenue."

"But your name?"

"I changed my name, like you; you know. I used to be named Son of Laughing Horse; now I'm Son of Steel."

"Son of Laughing Horse! But that's an Indian name!"

"Sure," smiled Comrade Stalinovsky. "I'm an Indian—a Bushwick Indian. Bushwick Indians always live in Brooklyn."

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, Crystal. 9, Electors. 10, Manatee. 13, Many years ago. 15, Crypt. 16, Act. 18, Oils. 19, Isle. 20, Hereunto. 23, Claptrap. 24, Item. 25, Rule. 26, Orb. 28, Shape. 29, Missing links. 32, Mayoral. 33, Tyrolean. 34, Isolate.

Down. 2, Rearrest. 3, Stamp dealers. 4, Amen. 5, Clue. 6, Accra. 7, Horatio. 8, Espouse. 11, Tat. 12, Eyeteeth. 14, Scottish soil. 17, Seraphim. 21, Tea plant. 22, Primate. 23, Closure. 27, Bills. 28, Sky. 30, Gray. 31, Nags.

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A TIME FOR LOVE

— the perfect summe
Of all delight . . .

TOBIAS HUME, 1605

That very night, when I was ill and laid upon my bed, she giving him an opportunity of being alone with me, and by her care keeping anybody from disturbing us, he had with me about two hours' discourse, upon his knees by my bedside. Wherein he did so handsomely express his passion (he was pleased to say he had for me) and his fear of being by my father's command separated from me . . . that though I can truly say that when he knelt down by me I was far from having resolved to own I would have him, yet his discourse so far prevailed that I consented to give him, as he desired, leave to let his father mention it to mine . . .

Thus we parted, this evening, after I had given away myself to him, and if I had not done so that night, I had been, by my father's separating us, kept from doing it, at least for a long time.

Diary of MARY BOYLE, *later Countess of Warwick*, 1640

Love Song

You are the willow-tree of my life,
And thy shadow is ever drowned in the pool of my desiring.
The grace of thy body is as the voice of the wind in thy boughs,
Nor is Sandalwood as lovely as thy flesh.
The palest satin is not as thy skin is ;
You bend, are soft, and warmly pliable
Oh willow-tree of my life !

SIMON GROVE

Sweet Fever

How to say no, when she was saying yes in that voice, would tax the will of a shift of prophets. No use to struggle for there was a laziness coming heavily upon me, and all I wanted to do was stretch my muscles and lie near her, to breathe her scent, to be near her mouth, in reach of the softnesses of her.

" Yes," I said.

" O, Huw," she said, and put an arm slowly about my neck and pulled me down to kiss me, with strength that was savage, and sounds were in her throat, and round movements tormented her

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body, and the grip of her fingers left bruises for days to come. And I had a madness hot within me . . . No man shall know what gods are working in him, then . . .

Then . . . your eyes see plainly. The trees are green, just the same as they were. No change has come . . .

Only the song of a thrush, and the smell of green, and the peace of the mountain-side.

And Ceinwen, lying quiet . . . She opened her eyes and looked up at me, and she sighed a little bit, and a breath got caught on the crag of a sob, and she swallowed deep to be rid of it.

"O, Huw," she said . . . "Sweetheart mine, what did you do?"

"I loved you," I said.

"Glad I am I never knew," she said. "O glad I am the first is you. There will never be another. Sweetheart mine, only you."

"Peach blossom," I said, and kissed her, and sat to look down in the Valley.

How green was my Valley that day . . .

RICHARD LLEWELLYN, *How Green Was My Valley*

Of Nature Natural . . .

Like the torrent that falls
From the heights of Youmadong,
Like the lightning which falls
On the oaks of Mandalay,
Of nature natural
Is the desire that draws me to thee.

From the Burmese of Asmapour,
translated by E. POWYS MATHERS

Three's A Crowd

It is unusual for a young lady to walk alone with her affianced lover; that they should see each other only in the presence of a third person is perhaps an error on the right side. Man is encroaching and Woman is easily worked upon through her pity, gratitude or love, to permit of those little familiar caresses which, experience shows, often extinguish the Man's love while increasing the Woman's. Long *tête-à-têtes* between lovers are certainly not likely to increase in Man that reverence which forms part of all true love . . .

The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine,
Mid Nineteenth Century

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The Common Lot

"Yes, Ma'am, wanderer though I've been, a wanderer has times when he seeks the common lot. Sailors, too, they'll not be content without marriage. 'Tis an instinct universal to worship virginity . . .

"Aye, even a sailor knows that. And while he is apt to live according to the dictates of human nature in the exercise of his calling, yet he'll be choicey enough in the matter of a wife . . .

"There's traders too, who have their business in all lonely spots. They couldn't work with a sane mind if they didn't obey Nature and accept what she provides. No, Ma'am. I hope I don't debase your mind by any utterance of the Truth that's likely to occur to me as notable . . .

"I'm saying nothing about missionaries. They generally take a wife with them, by a wise provision of Nature. But traders—you may take it from me, Ma'am, that a man who's spent his life in building up commerce and empire in secluded spots of land *or* sea is allowed by Providence a bit more tether than the chap that's living at home . . .

"And when he's ready for it, the sacrament of holy marriage to some sensible virgin is going to wash out and purify all his wild doings in foreign parts. Which it might not rightly be expected to do if he'd given way to human nature in Piccadilly or Pimlico. Or Victoria Street, Westminster . . ."

ALFRED ALOYSIUS HORN, 1861-1931 *Trader Horn*

Primrose Path

Come my Celia, let us prove,
While wee may, the sports of love ;
Time will not be ours for ever :
He, at length, our good will sever.
Spend not then his gifts in vaine.
Sunnes that set, may rise againe :
But, if once wee lose this light,
'Tis, with us, perpetuall night.
Why should we deferre our joyes ?
Fame, and rumor are but toyes . . .

'Tis no sinne, loves fruit to steale,
But the sweet theft to reveale :
To bee taken, to be seene,
These have crimes accounted beene.

BEN JONSON, *The Forest*, 1616

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★*" Rhythm and the dance," says Patrick Leigh Fermor in his extraordinary and brilliant story of Voodoo in the island of Haiti, " are probably the most pressing needs of the Negro in his primitive state . . . For thousands of years his whole being has been conditioned by the beat of the drum . . .*

" Every Haitian . . . from his earliest childhood, is spiritually geared for the event of incarnation ; and he knows that the moment of miracle occurs in the dark tonnelle, *where the air is afloat with mysteries, and where the drums are already violently reacting on his nerves and brain. He knows, too, that he is a vessel that the Lwas may at any moment inhabit . . .*

" These Lwas are coarse, vital, almost human figures of his own race ; they eat, drink, dance, sleep and make love, and every Haitian knows their habits, their clothes, their appearance and their tastes. He longs to be possessed by them, and in the critical second when artificially created events, suggestion and hypnotism . . . have reduced him to a state of hysteria, his dream comes true . . ."

DRUMS IN HAITI

by PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR

THE pulse of the drums grew stronger until, at a turn in the flank of a little cliff, it became all at once very loud, and augmented now by a steady metallic clangour and the sound of singing. Rodolfe led the way along a path between broken fences and waited for us outside the entrance to the *tonnelle*. The noise, the throng of Haitians, the scene that was taking place, and, above all, the idea of intruding three pale faces into a gathering so exclusively Negro, made us pause.

Slowly, out of the turmoil and the smoke and the shattering noise of the drums, which, for a time, drove everything except their impact from the mind, the details began to detach themselves.

The *tonnelle* was a roof of woven palm-trash, supported in the middle by a wooden pillar painted in spirals of blue and red. The trees and bushes, and the Haitians gathered round the edges, blocked out the moon, and the only light radiated over the beaten mud floor from an oil-lamp that hung from a nail on the pillar. At one end stood the Houmfor, the small white temple, and the

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three Rada drummers sat at the other, gripping their long wooden tom-toms between their knees.

These instruments are the dwelling-places of gods of whom the drummers are the especial ministers, and each of the brightly painted sections of tree-trunk is of a different size and key. They taper in both directions from the broadest point just below the top, and rawhide is stretched across the upper end and lashed to massive pegs. The fourth instrument is the Hogan, a hollow iron vessel with a handle on which an iron rod beats with continuous clangour. The rhythm of the last two are unchanging and the second sometimes alters, but the first drum, which dominates everything, is subjected to countless changes of rhythm and mood and pitch.

The floor was covered with dancers, but at their centre about twenty women danced round the main pillar in a more formal fashion. They wore identical white dresses, and white kerchiefs were tied round their heads. One of them, a middle-aged virago of enormous bulk, was plainly some kind of a leader. They were the hounci-bossales and hounci-canzos, Voodoo adepts of the first and second stages of initiation, who form the staff of the *tonnelle*, and act as acolytes and chorus to all the ceremonies under the direction of the woman of more commanding aspect who was the mambo, or high priestess.

Backwards and forwards, very slowly, the dancers shuffled, and at each step their chins shot out and their buttocks jerked upwards, while their shoulders shook in double time. Their eyes were half closed and from their mouths came again and again the same incomprehensible words, the same short line of chanted song, repeated after each iteration, half an octave lower. At a change in the beat of the drums, they straightened their bodies, and, flinging their arms in the air while their eyes rolled upwards, spun round and round.

A thin clanging, caused by the shaking of the *açon* and the ringing of a little bell in the priest's left hand, cut across the sound of the four musicians. The *açon*, symbol of the priestly office, is a long-necked gourd enclosed in a loose cage of snakes' vertebræ and coloured beads. When the chanting subsided, the Houngan would intone a new couplet. He was seconded in everything by the Houngenikon, whose name means a candidate for the Voodoo priesthood, for the rank of Houngan.

So crammed were the three square yards of the Houmfor with the stage properties of the cult, that it took some moments to become aware that these manifold appliances were arranged with the utmost care.

On the massive white cubic altar stood a heavy wooden acute

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angle, an A without a cross-bar, about a yard high, festooned with coloured necklaces. A recess filled with water lay to one side of the altar, and above it leant the twisting iron serpent of Damballah. Serpents were also frescoed round an old lithograph of St. Patrick trampling the snake of Ireland. Next to this a schooner was painted, the emblem of Ogoun Agoué, the God of the Sea. Calabashes adorned with beads and red rags stood in rows, interspersed with wooden bowls and china pots. These are the containers, at different junctures of their progress, of human souls.

A cross and an image of the Blessèd Virgin were almost hidden among bottles full of ambiguous liquids, with dried flowers in their necks. In the ground had been struck an old-fashioned cavalry sabre, the emblem of Ogoun Ferraille, the war god. Two sequin-embroidered flags were crossed above the altar, each displaying a bird with its wings outstretched, and the remaining wall space was covered with pictures of Christian saints who have also attained high rank in the Voodoo pantheon. At the striking of a match, pictures of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, St. Anthony, St. Nicholas, St. Charles Borromspeo, St. James the Major, St. Rose of Lima and the Archangel Michael appeared out of the shadows.

At the edge of the crowd we came upon a little hut, scarcely larger than a dog kennel: *Le caye Zombi.* The beam of a torch revealed a black cross inside and some rags and chains and shackles and whips: adjuncts used at the Ghédé ceremonies, which Haitian ethnologists connect with the rejuvenation rites of Osiris recorded in the Book of the Dead. A fire was burning, in which two sabres and a large pair of pincers were standing, their lower parts red with the heat: *le Feu Marinette,* dedicated to a goddess who is the evil obverse of the bland and amorous Maitresse Erzulie Fréda Dahomin, the Goddess of Love.

Beyond, with its base held fast in a socket of stone, stood a large black wooden cross. A white death's head was painted near the base, and over the crossbar were pulled the sleeves of a very old morning coat. Here also rested the brim of a battered bowler hat, through the torn crown of which the top of the cross projected. This totem, with which every peristyle must be equipped, is not a lampoon of the central event of the Christian faith, but represents the God of the Cemeteries and the Chief of the Legion of the Dead, Baron Samedi. The Baron is paramount in all matters immediately beyond the tomb. He is Cerberus and Charon as well as Æacus, Rhadamanthus and Pluto.

Men were now scattered among the ranks of the female houncis, and the dance had grown more violent. The dancers, simultaneously with the advance and recoil of buttocks, shoulders and

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chin, shook their frames from side to side in quadruple time so that their bodies were trembling and jerking in every possible direction. The mambo moved across the *tonnelle* with her shoulder-blades shaking in a palsy while her great hind-quarters, slowly evolving, rolled up her spine and flowed forward and sank again with the motion of a surfacing and plunging whale.

In slow response to these cumulative hours of incantation, the gods were stirring in their distant home in Africa. Each couplet and each step of the *yanvalloux* brought them closer, and the night above the heads of the dancers was becoming populated with the denizens of that remote Valhalla: Legba, Loko, Damballah Wédo, Zaka, Agoué Arroyo, Erzulie, Bossou Comblamin, Ogoun Ferraille, Ogoun Badagris and the whole company of the Lwas, the divine spirits of the tribes of Guinea and Dahomey and the Congo, who can only be summoned by drums and dances and sacrifices. They lurk in the air above the palm roofs and peer down at the dancers in search of devotees in whom to incarnate themselves. The atmosphere of the *tonnelle* was heavy with their impending presence.

There was a sudden flurried movement, and the ranks broke. In the space which was suddenly cleared, a young man staggered, catching at the forearm of one of the houncis to prevent himself from falling. The others ran to his help. He remained stiff and inert in their arms, with his mouth wide open and his eyes revulsed, and one shoulder-blade gyrating at great speed, the shining black mesh of his shoulder muscles shuddering with the lift of the bone.

Two of the girls bent down and rolled up his trousers. Then, breaking from his supporters, he began a staggering, unconscious dance in the middle of the *tonnelle*. The tempo of the drumming changed to an ominous roll, and the Houngan followed his erratic progress, dipping his *açon* into a can of water and sprinkling the dancer in the manner of a priest with a hyssop-twig.

The young man snatched the can from him and spilt three pools round the pillar and then one in front of each of the drums, and, falling on his face, licked up the mud. The Houngenikon and the mambo took him in turn by both hands, and pumped them up and down with the motion of Oranges and Lemons. He made a few more steps and then, falling against the pillar, with his chest heaving as though it would break through his ribs, he collapsed into the arms of the dancers. The houncis gently wiped his face with a red cloth and his eyelids slowly fell, and his head sank to his breast. Covering his face with the cloth, they carried him, with his feet dragging behind him, from the floor.

Just before his collapse, a universal cry had broken out, and the beat of the drums had again changed. It was the beginning of an incarnation, and, by some mannerism in the dancing limbs of his

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human habitation, the descended Lwa had been recognized. It was Ogoun Ferraille.

The anthem of the War God burst from every throat, and the dancers, crouching in a frog-like position with their knees almost touching the floor, once more filled the *tonnelle*.

The Houngan, meanwhile, stooping before the pillar, was drawing in white maize-flour the *vévér*, or heraldic emblem of the god. Filling his right hand, he turned the circle formed by closing his thumb and forefinger into a spout, through which the white powder was poured. Then, with the speed and precision of a pastry cook with an icing-funnel, he limned on the beaten dust the intricate white curves and triangles and loops and stars. Straightening up and blowing into the hollow of his hand, he sent a white cloud of flour into the air.

The drums changed and the Houngenikon came dancing on to the floor, holding a vessel filled with some burning liquid from which sprang blue and yellow flames. As he circled the pillar and spilt three flaming libations, his steps began to falter. Then, lurching backwards with the same symptoms of delirium that had manifested themselves in his forerunner, he flung down the whole blazing mass. The houncis caught him as he reeled, and removed his sandals and rolled his trousers up, while the kerchief fell from his head and laid bare his young woolly skull. The other houncis knelt to put their hands in the flaming mud, and rub it over their hands and elbows and faces.

The Houngan's bell and *açon* rattled officiously and the young priest was left by himself, reeling and colliding against the pillar, helplessly catapulting across the floor, and falling among the drums. His eyes were shut, his forehead screwed up and his chin hung loose. Then, as though an invisible fist had dealt him a heavy blow, he fell to the ground and lay there, with his head stretching backwards in a rictus of anguish until the tendons of his neck and shoulders projected like roots. Only the whites of his eyes were visible as, although his eye-sockets were now wide open, the pupils had vanished under the lids.

Foam collected on his lips. The priest stooped over him with his rattling implements, and after a few minutes the young man rose to one knee and, like a sleepwalker, regained his feet; and at last, with the same painful expression, as though his whole body were on fire, danced a few disjointed steps. The howling anthem and the drums burst upon him. Slowly, slowly, though his face lost nothing of the blank agony of its abstraction, his limbs regained their co-ordination. "He's mounted by the Lwa," the whisper ran, as the possessed figure began to evolve. "*Li gain Loa*!" It was the beginning of a long, unconscious ballet.

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Now the Houngan, dancing a slow step and brandishing a cutlass, advanced from the fireside, flinging the weapon again and again into the air, and catching it by the hilt. In a few minutes he was holding it by the blunted end of the blade. Dancing slowly towards him, the Houngenikon reached out and grasped the hilt. The priest retired, and the young man, twirling and leaping, spun from side to side of the *tonnelle*. The ring of spectators rocked backwards as he bore down upon them whirling the blade over his head, with the gaps in his bared teeth lending to his mandril face a still more feral aspect. The *tonnelle* was filled for a few seconds with genuine and unmitigated terror. The singing had turned to a universal howl and the drummers, rolling and lolling with the furious and invisible motion of their hands, were lost in a transport of noise.

Flinging back his head, the novice drove the blunt end of the cutlass into his stomach. His knees sagged, and his head fell forward as he sank in a mock death. In the instant that he seemed about to crumple up, a dancer rushed from the ring of spectators and bound a scarlet cloth round his middle.

A dance of death-agony followed. The Houngenikon gyrated and sank and recovered, the muscles of his arm taut with the effort to thrust the sword home. Shuffling and singing, the dancers crept back on to the floor, closing round the throes of the young priest, who, lurching round and round across the floor, disappeared into the Houmfor as the wave seemed about to submerge him. The monotony of flux and reflux began again.

But not for many minutes. The door of the Houmfor swung open, and the drums beat a retreat. The young priest burst into the emptied peristyle, and danced violently to the middle. His back was hollowed, his shoulders squared and his head carried arrogantly erect.

It was a complete metamorphosis. In every line in his body and every step and movement, death and dissolution had been replaced by pride and triumph and life. The cutlass was still held to his middle and the cloth still made its scarlet smear. But in his left hand he held a bottle of rum, and in the corner of his mouth a long cigar was stuck, leaving in the air, as he twirled and sprang, spirals and arabesques of smoke. Leaping backwards on his heels in a flaunting hornpipe, he took the cigar from his mouth, bent his head back and swallowed a long draught from the bottle. Then, leaping across the *tonnelle* with his legs bent at right angles, he began to revolve on one heel while the other leg, raised high in the air, swept him round on this pivot with a scythe-like revolution.

As he appeared about to lose his balance, he changed legs with a stamp, looping and coiling in this manner round the amphitheatre in a series of arcs which dwindled in radius until they brought him

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to the middle for the triple libations to the pillar, and then to the drums. Halting here, he stuck the neck of the bottle between the teeth of each of the drummers in turn.

The dancers had fallen to their knees in a ring. The Houngenikon wove his way towards a young hounci, and, striking her on the arm with the flat of his cutlass, danced round the circle and back to her once more, and forced the bottle-neck into her mouth. Then, remaining in one place, but marking time with a complicated step, he held out his arm. The hounci rose, and, resting her hand on his crooked fingers, pirouetted in a complete circle, then back, and then round once more, and retreated shuffling and shaking in the steps of the *mahi* dance. Moving to the next kneeling figure, he repeated the same gestures, and the girl made the same stately revolutions, motions as grave as the pirouette in a seventeenth-century *pavane*, and danced away. The delicate urbanity of this evolution struck a surprising note among the prolonged barbarian spasms of the dance. Could it have slipped into the ritual in the time of Louis XV?

When the cycle of salutes had finished, all were dancing again, many of them with an almost stationary, burglarious prowl, or in couples which stalked round and round each other, or leaped up and down in solitary accesses of elation. The floor could hold no more.

In the centre, dominating everything from the plinth of the pillar, stood the Houngenikon with his head and torso reared backwards and his legs planted wide. His right arm was still downstretched with the thrust of the cutlass, and his left hand, grasping the nearly empty bottle, rested on his hip. He was bathed in sweat and quivering slightly all over. The bared teeth and the whites of his eyes shone like the apertures of a dark mask lying on the snow, while the combustion of his cigar and the long dragon-like prongs of smoke that he fired down his nostrils turned his head into a steaming black thurible. Although the pupils were slowly reappearing, his eyes retained a look of the remotest abstraction.

Motions of disorder erupted at short intervals as the Lwas effected their entrance into one or other of the dancers. They writhed and staggered and fell and lay twitching and gasping, and slowly rose again transformed, and evolving with the impotence of somnambulists under the control of their immanent deities. The Lwas were falling out of the sky as thick as leaves, and by the time, hours later, that we extricated ourselves to go, the *tonnelle* had become a running, stamping, howling, gasping and shrieking theodrome.

The moon had set half a dozen hours ago, and the rattle of the

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drums faded as we followed the beam of Rodolfe's torch. Faded, but as they died, others sounded and, as we advanced, grew louder. Going home was unthinkable. Plainly the only thing to do was to continue till we fell asleep, or till everything had come to an end.

The following hours were spent in two different *tonnelles*—theatres, like the first, of multiple incarnation.

The drums all fell silent at last. Colour crept back into the mango trees and palms as we walked home along the lanes. Dawn was breaking with its startling tropical swiftness. Just before we reached the Champs de Mars, across which a platoon of soldiers was already marching briskly to break the Colours, we overtook a troop of Negroes. We recognized them as our companions from the first *tonnelle*, and exchanged *bonjours*.

"Where are they going to, Rodolfe?"

He looked slightly surprised at the question.

"*Où? Mais à la messe.*"

Indeed, the bells of the neo-Gothic cathedral were clanking for early Mass, and every instant the sunlight filled the sky with a brighter radiance.

* * *

MEA CULPA!

I was very young when I was appointed Professor at Glasgow—I think only half the age of the youngest of my colleagues . . .

Nervousness is one of the inevitable drawbacks which youth has to set against its magnificent advantages. I felt my ignorance of the world. I was afraid of making mistakes, rather afraid of my colleagues, and also frightened by stories, which people who ought to have known better had told me, about the formidable turbulence of the Middle Class, which in those days was very large.

One night when I was travelling in a sleeper to London the train at some point became unduly noisy. In my dreams I naturally attributed the noise to the Middle, and started up, saying, "I *insist* on silence." A polite stranger in the same compartment woke up and apologised.

GILBERT MURRAY, O.M.,
writing in *The College Courant*, Glasgow

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STANLEY HUTCHINSON

In spite of eddication, fine manners and all, natur will tell in the end

by NUGENT BARKER

WELL, Mr. Bidmead had a sow. And she waun't no ordinary sow, for all that she spent her time grunting and wallering in the mire; but there was summat about those eyes of her'n, a sparkle, a 'by yer leave,' an 'after you,' as ain't gener'ly to be found in sties. And it was onny reasonable to suppose that these fine manners might reveal theirselves later on in the liddle porkers that were gathered around her when the story began; it was whispered all over the place how the fat things should ought to grow up into swine of a special grandeur, seeing that their father was hisself a well-mannered hog, though his ways was less dentical than their mother's, I reckon. So one day-morning, Mr. Bidmead waun't terrible surprised when one of the liddle fellers, whose age at that time must a been somewhere in the neighbourhood of six weeks or thereabout, walked up to the cottage, poked his snout round the door-jamb, and offered him, in the purtiest manner possible, the time of day.

"'Talkin'," said Mr. Bidmead. "Now, ain't that very nice?" Whereupon he invited the liddle chap to dinner, and they got chatting and laughing together, and after an hour or so the old man asked him how his name was called, and it turned out to be Stanley Hutchinson.

"I knowed some Hutchinsons once, lived over in Choley," said Mr. Bidmead; "big chep, five darters, lost his wife in a railway accident. Took on the *Green Cross* when her feyther died."

"'Tain't those Hutchinsons," said the liddle pig, turning up his snout. Presently Mr. Bidmead brought out the elderberry wine; and from that day onward the old man did all that lay in his power to make that pig happy. Cooked him flour and water puddings; pushed up a rush-bottomed chair for his own using; read him bits out of the daily papers, or kept him supplied with the current prices of pork. And at night-time they'd have out the cribbage cards, or maybe the backgammon board, and the bottle of elderberry wine would stand betwixt um; then 'twas that Mr. Hutchinson, after a few glasses, would come up with the funniest tales that

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you ever heard, or astound that old man with some of his clever tricks with matches. And last thing of all, when their eyes was so sleepy that they didn't know whatsumdever to do with um, they'd go slapping up to bed, and Mr. Bidmead would lay awake for whole hours listening to Stanley Hutchinson snoring in the room opposite his'n, for he was a lonely man.

There never was a more eddicated pig than Stanley Hutchinson; and people used to come on foot and on horseback, in pony-traps and in farm-carts, from Houghton, and Madehurst, and Halnaker, and from beyond Ammerley, and from beyond Heyshott, to crack their jokes with him.

Now it came to pass, that what with the extra food and drink and other expenses, Mr. Bidmead found hisself one day at the end of all his money. The thought worrited him, as you can imagine; looking towards Mr. Hutchinson, he couldn't hardly contrive to keep back his tears. So within three days he had decided that the onny thing to be done, the onny thing, was to go selling Stanley Hutchinson's relations for what they would fetch. Off he went to Tom Garrett, the carrier. "Lookee now, Tom Garr'tt," said he. And so it was all arranged how the whole stock should be taken to Arundel in time for next market day.

Eh, dear oh me, that was a terrible sad parting. When Stanley Hutchinson learnt what was in the wind, he crept up to Mr. Bidmead's bedroom, and searched for a hankercher in a drawer; and by Job, there he found a golden coin, bright gold it was, with nicks upon it as sharp as new. And directly he see it, he thought how he'd like to swaller it, for in spite of all his eddication, in spite of his fine manners, in spite of everything, Stanley Hutchinson at heart was nothing but a pig. And then his eddication got the better of him, and he thought how he'd give it a liddle lick; so he give it a liddle lick; and then he wrapped it up in the hankercher, and took it downstairs, and blowed his snout in the garden.

But he was a brave feller; and after a stroll or two up the paths, and over the flower-beds, he began to see how Mr. Bidmead's plan was all for the best. So he said to hisself: "Lookee, Stan, lookee here, me pig, there's no hem use worritin' like a engineer," and as soon as ever the old man had got his back turned, by Job, Stanley took his mother aside, and gave her the golden coin, telling her how it would keep her rich and contented during her last days—for she guessed exactly what was laid up for her in the time to come, surelye. With that the old sow swallered the golden coin, a sovereign it was, and good money; and when she turned back to the cart that was to take her and the children to Arundel, there was such an 'after you' look in her eyes that Stanley Hutchinson reckoned he hadn't ever felt so proud of her in his whole life.

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" Gee up ! " he cried. So the young porkers scrambled in first, while their brother looked up from the road and wished um good-bye.

" Goo'-bye, Elsie. Goo'-bye, Syd." So it went round. " Goo'-bye, Feyther. Give my love to Ethel." For it was let on to the children how they were all going off to spend a few days with some cousins that they had never seen. " Goo'-bye, Mother darlin'," said the liddle pig.

And so they all went away, and got killed.

That evening, when Mr. Bidmead and the pig were half-way through their game of cribbage, they put up the cards and turned their faces to the wood fire. " 'Tain't no go," said the old man softly, thinking of the fine mess that he had got hisself into ; and after trying him with some clever tricks with matches, Mr. Hutchinson thought the same.

So they went to bed ; and on the following morning it was no different ; dull voices, flat feet, and looks that waun't no better than a rushlight. But just as he was passing Stanley the sweet whey butter, all of a sudden the old man give out a great cry, fit to blow the whole of Slipton village off the top of the hill.

" Why, by Job," he hollered, " if I bain't the biggest fool that ever was borned ! " And with that, he started to walk up and down the parlour, now this way, now that way, up and down the parlour he walked, with his hands behind him, and his eyes growing rounder every minute.

" What's wrong with 'ee now ? " asked the liddle pig.

" Hoy, there's nothin' wrong at all ! " cried Mr. Bidmead, " everything's right—eh, lawk-a-mussy-me," he shouted, grinning from ear to ear, " it queers me why I didn't think an't before ! " Whereupon the old chap began to sniffle as loud as he could.

" I jest be g'wine to git a pocket-hankercher, Mus Hutchinson," said he.

" There's nothin' like um," said the liddle pig. But Mr. Bidmead onny sniffed the louder, strutted up and down the parlour, and winked as though he'd never stop. " To git a pocket-hankercher," he kept on repeating, clasping his bony hands together : then all of a sudden the old man couldn't keep it up a moment longer, but opened the door, and runned to his room as fast as the stairs would carry him ; while Stanley put his trotters on the winder-sill, and watched the liddle sparrers as they played in the street.

There now, it waun't long before the old chap was down again, staring at nothing, and clenching his hands so that the knuckles gleamed.

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" Wheer be my g-golden coin ? " he whispered. " Lawk-a-mussy-me, oh wheer be my g-golden coin ? "

" What golden coin ? " asked the liddle pig.

" Oh, Stanley, Stanley, wheer by my g-golden coin ? "

" Which coin be that ? " asked the liddle pig.

Yet nothing else would the old man say, but now and again he moaned a bit, and give out a real sniffle, for he was very upset and had clean forgotten to git his pocket-hankercher. So Stanley took a turn in the garden, saying to hisself how the fresh air would do him a power of good. There he went snuffing the snowdrops and the pretty coloured crocuses, and reading out the linen labels that the old man had tied upon sticks ; and when at last he had come to the far end, with its row of tall trees and the empty sty where his mother had reared him, he shook his head, and for ten whole minutes walked like an undertaker, to and thro', to and thro', beneath the wintry branches.

Now, that was market day at Arundel ; but this here worriting had put it clean out of Mr. Bidmead's mind. " Eh, by Job ! " he hollered, all of a sudden. And with that, the old man began to put on his gaiters at a hem of a rate, and to call hisself all the lamentable hard names that he could think of. So it happened that by the time the liddle pig had wandered back to the house, Mr. Bidmead was hurrying down Slipton Hill on his way to Arundel, to attend the sale of Mr. Hutchinson's relations. Well, it waun't very long before Stanley guessed what was in the wind, so he fetched a paper, and set down in Mr. Bidmead's chair in the parlour, and spent his time figgering out the state of the pig market ; but when Mr. Bidmead came home in the twilight, twitching his hands with excitement, and pulling in his lips so far that you couldn't see um, never a word did the old feller say, no, never one word, about the wunnerful prices that the hogs had fetched.

"I be middlin' rich," he thought to hisself, "I be middlin' rich."

That night he spoke again to Stanley Hutchinson about the missing coin, and the liddle pig went hunting all over the house to find where it had got to : " 'Tis hem strange, wheer it can a' got to," the pig murmured, nosing around. But Mr. Bidmead kept on thinking : " I be middlin' rich . . . I be middlin' rich . . ." Then he forgot how happy he was, and fretted like a miser for the lost coin.

So the week went by ; and although the weather suddenly changed, and early spring came to the beech woods of Slipton, there was always a nip in the evening air, when Mr. Bidmead, leaning forrard, throwed another log on to the fire, and Mr.

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Hutchinson, leaning backard, watched in the flames the sparkle of his mother's eyes; and sometimes Stanley would let on to hisself that he could hear the sow's soft trotters in the room; and once he heard her gulp the golden coin, at a single swaller, without as much as a "How did ye come by it, Stan?"

One morning, when Mr. Bidmead was out faggoting, the postman handed in a parcel, and the liddle pig opened it, being it was urgent. And by Job, there lay the golden coin, wrapped in a letter, and placed in a box; and the letter came from a butcher over in Parham, telling Mr. Bidmead how he'd found the sovereign in the sow's innards.

Now, Stanley waun't prepared for this; and first thing he done, he thought how silly the whole thing was, and how he'd better keep the coin for hisself, like, and burn the letter straightaway. And then he thought how glad Mr. Bidmead would be to see that coin back again, and all his worritings over. So he took it up to the old man's bedroom, and put it into the drawer: and there it lay, and there it shone and sparkled, until the liddle pig fancied that there waun't a thing to equal it but the sparkle of his mother's eyes. And then he thought how suspicious the old man would be, finding it back in the drawer again; all this time the coin was winking, and suddenly he thought how much he'd like to swaller it. And then his eddication got the better of him, and he thought how he'd give it a liddle lick; so he give it a liddle lick; and at that moment, by Job, who did he hear on the stairs but Mr. Bidmead. With that, he wrapped the sovereign in a hankercher, and took it across to his room; and there he blowed his snout, and there he blowed it, and when he blowed his snout the second time he swallered the golden coin.

So there it was; and that evening, when he had torn up the letter, and he and Mr. Bidmead were playing cribbage, his wits went wandering, to think how that coin would be his for evermore. "Your play, Stan," said the pig's old friend. Coming out of his day-dream, the pig played a card; then he gazed into the fire, the fire put out its tongue at him, and young Hutchinson laughed.

For a long time after he'd swallered the golden coin, Stanley Hutchinson did nothing but wink to hisself all day and half the night. Then the weather became warmer, and in the evenings he and Mr. Bidmead used to chat and laugh together over a fire that waun't as big as it used to be in the winter-time: and whether it was for this reason, I don't rightly know, but although he blinked, and peered, and listened as hard as ever he could, the liddle pig waun't able to see the sparkle of his mother's eye no longer, or to hear the voice that had always seemed to grunt so favourable at

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the things he'd done. It is said, too, that the whole of the room began to rock a liddle behind his back, and that the old clock ticked its way clean into the middle of Stanley Hutchinson's soul. Later still, when spring began to change to summer, and the old man used to let the fire burn out entirely after the cooking was over, the dark chimbley *did* seem to be lighted up by a red glow of firelight, surelye: but the pig knowed how it waun't that at all, no fear, it was the golden coin that lay winking and burning in his innards.

So it went on, and Mr. Bidmead, kind old feller that he was, began to consarn hisself more than ever before with the comforts and pleasures of Mr. Hutchinson, bringing out the cribbage cards at all hours, and losing on purpose every mortal game that he put his hand to; fixing up the backgammon board, and going at it hammer and tongs, whether the liddle hog wished it or no; laughing like a nigger at the tricks with matches; and fetching in the elderberry wine whensumdever the pig looked a liddle bit hipped in the eye.

And on top of this, by Job, Stanley discovered that his mother's eyes were beginning to sparkle again; but this time he could see um in the paraffin lamp that the old man had bought out of the pig-money, and in the patches of light that twinkled on the new cups and sarcers and plates of Choley china; and sometimes, when the nights were very sleepy and hot, the old man would fall into a doze, with a smile upon his lips, and after a while his mouth would hang open, so that all of a sudden the room would fetch up with a snore as loud as a hog's. And at last Stanley Hutchinson couldn't abide it a moment longer. So one day near the beginning of June, he went to Mr. Bidmead, and gave it in how he would go searching for the lost coin.

"I justabout can't tell 'ee what makes me think so," said the liddle pig, "but I have an idea," said he . . . "I dunno but what," he continued, "I'll sure find that golden coin far, far away."

Then the old man looked at him, and said:

"If so be as I thought there was any truth in these words o' your'n, Stan, why then, I reckon I'd tell 'ee to go and search for the coin, surelye. But how can a chap," said the old man thoughtfully, "go searchin' for a golden coin what he's never seen, what he's never knowed the date of, what he'd never even heard tell of before that morning many weeks ago when I runned upstairs to my bedroom for to git me a pocket-handkercher?" So he went on, talking and talking, and all the time he was thinking to hisself most miserably: "Stan could tell me summat about that golden coin, I reckon." For the pig didn't know that the butcher had

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written again from Parham, a month earlier, asking Mr. Bidmead why he hadn't acknowledged the liddle parcel.

Mr. Bidmead had gone to the postman; and, hearing the most disturbing news that waun't entirely disconnected with Stanley Hutchinson, ever since that time the old chap had been beezled as to whether he should go prying further, for fear he might bring the most terrible shame upon hisself and the liddle cottage. Eh, by Job, it was a frightening thought! Mr. Hutchinson! His own Stanley! The cleverest pig in the village! And now, looking down at his toes, then round the parlour, and again at the liddle pig, Mr. Bidmead reckoned all at once how it would be wiser to ask no tom-fool questions about the matter, being as he'd onny get perky answers or maybe a few witty jokes that would leave him nowhere. So he said nothing. But he took a basket, and in it he put brown bread; and he put a pound of butter in it, and he put some cheese in it, and then he put some eggs in it, and then he put some salt and pepper in it, and a liddle elderberry wine, and then he put some apples in it, and then he said good-bye, and the pig went.

He went on a fine, blowy day in summer, and Slipton village knew him no more. Eh, dear oh me, how sudden it all was. And how they wondered whether he would ever come back . . . But I can tell you a liddle of his journey; I can foller him as far as my eyes reach.

In spite of the wind, it was a very hot day, for it was a very hot wind; and by the time he had come to the bottom of Slipton Hill, lawk-a-mussy-me, the basket was empty, clean holler it was, and Stanley Hutchinson sat upon his haunches, lifted his snout, and set up a most dismal cry.

Well, there waun't nothing for it but that he must go begging, which he done, and so purtily, that, by Job, he was able to get as much again as he had eaten, and he ate that too; and so it went on, until you couldn't have told him from a balloon-ball; and then he disappeared beyond the corner; and after that . . . he took hisself . . . I feel so certain sure . . . towards the place where they go killing and curing pigs . . .

Now, that ain't the end of the story. It's no more the end of the story than this story is the end of the world. But the disappearance of Stanley Hutchinson was the end of Mr. Bidmead, poor man. Two days after the pig had left him, the golden coin came back, and Mr. Bidmead couldn't hardly contain hisself for joy, but started to run from room to room of the liddle cottage, up and down the liddle cottage he runned, for it's a strange thing how much more pleased he was with the one sovereign than with all the money

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that he had got for the pigs. There was a bit of the miser in Mr. Bidmead, I reckon; yet no one can say that the old chap was selfish, and his eyes shone like gold when he thought to hisself: "My Stan will be follering soon."

So he arranged a lot of surprises for his pig Stan. He bought some fish, and ice to keep it as fresh as a daisy; and he bought some eggs, and heaped um in a pyramid on a plate; and he give the elderberry wine a taste, to see if it hadn't turned a liddle; and he brought some roses from the garden, and stood um out in ornaments and jugs; and he shuffled all the cribbage cards, and even went so far as to shake the backgammon dice, ready for throwing; and the pig never came. That was in June. In July the old man couldn't hardly shamble up to his bedroom; in August he waun't no better than a clodpate; near the middle of autumn the villagers shook their heads over the fire.

"He had no ought to take up with a pig like Stan," they muttered; "that business has catched a holt of him, surelye."

But bless ye, I disremember half the things they said of Bidmead, who onny put his fingers in his ears, like, and fared his own way. His clothes went to pieces, the garden grew, he ate where he would, never spreading the table cloth; and his nose sniffled for want of a hankercher. One night he gazed oddly over the parlour; he kept on blinking his liddle pig-eyes as though he'd no ought to be there.

"'Tis no use, hangin' on in this purty place," he muttered; "I justabout don't remember what everything's for." So he shuffled out of his chair; then, seeing the cribbage cards, put um idly into his pocket. Afterwards he turned out the light, and left the cottage for the last time.

The wind blew, and clouds rushed over the sky; the moon kept peeping out at shortish intervals, and during one of um the old man put his hand into his pocket, and took out the golden coin. It was all he had left, the rest of his money was clean gone, and as he looked at it he thought how he'd like to swaller it. But the fag end of his eddication got the better of him, and he thought how he'd give the coin a liddle lick; so he give it a liddle lick; and with that, he went shuffling and padding to the bottom of the garden.

The wind was tossing through the trees. Sometimes it sounded like human laughter, and sometimes like the voices of all kinds of animals, from geese to elephants. The shape of the sty rose up before him; and when he opened the door, and peeped inside, he give a grunt of satisfaction.

"Gruntin'," said a liddle voice. "Now, ain't that very nice?" And, by Job, there was Stanley Hutchinson's ghost; and from

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that day to this, nobody never goes near the sty, nobody never goes near it, because of the voices that can be heard there, in the small hours, grunting and laughing together over the cribbage cards.

And if you don't believe this story, you ought to, and if you don't believe it, you can be no lover of pigs, and if you don't believe it, that's a pity; why, everybody in Slipton will tell you how it was all true. And maybe that's the onny virtue in it. For it ain't Shakespeare, by a long chalk, and it ain't Milton, and it ain't even Bunyan, though I suppose at a pinch it might be called the story of a Pig's Progress.

* * *

STAND AT EASE

It was Einstein who made the real trouble. He announced in 1905 that there was no such thing as absolute rest. After that there never was.

STEPHEN LEACOCK

The truly happy man is surely the man whose work is his play, and his play merely recreation.

THE VERY REV. W. R. INGE

A man is seldom so harmlessly occupied as when he is making money.

DR. JOHNSON

Happiness is like coke—it is a by-product.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

The real problem of your leisure is how to keep other people from using it.

Author Unknown

April 23 . . . I went and fished til night, but caught nothing at all . . .

April 28 . . . went to fish, but tooke nothing . . .

May 1.—This day I rested at home all day, only I went to fish a little in the morne, but tooke nothing; and my wife went to her mother . . .

May 4.—This day I fished in the forenoone and took 3 trouts.

CAPTAIN ADAM EYRE, *Dyurnall*, 1647

The essence of hell is a perpetual holiday.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

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WRITERS' CIRCLE

We poets are (upon a poet's word)
Of all mankind the creatures most absurd

ALEXANDER POPE, 1688-1744

I never felt inclined to write, any more than to breathe. It never occurred to me that my literary sense was exceptional: I gave everyone credit for it; for there is nothing miraculous in a natural faculty to the man who has it. In art the amateur, the collector, the enthusiast, is the man who lacks the faculty for producing it. The Venetian wants to be a cavalry soldier; the Gaucho wants to be a sailor; the fish wants to fly and the bird to swim. I never wanted to write. I know now, of course, the scarcity of literary faculty, but I still don't want it. You cannot want a thing and have it too.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, 1856-1950, *Sixteen Self-Sketches*

Humble Pie

I write but of familiar stuffe
Because my stile is lowe;
I fear to wade in weightie works,
Or past my reach to rowe.

GEORGE TURBERVILLE, 1540-1610

Early Struggles

During the last year I had saved together a little sum of money. When I counted it over I found it to be thirteen rix dollars banco (about thirty shillings). I was quite overjoyed at the possession of so much wealth, and as my mother now most resolutely required that I should be apprenticed to a tailor, I prayed and besought her that I might make a journey to Copenhagen, that I might see the greatest city in the world.

"What wilt thou do there?" asked my mother.

"I will become famous," returned I, and I then told her all that I had read about extra-ordinary men. "People have," said I, "at first an immense deal of adversity to go through, and then they will be famous."

. . . I wept, I prayed, and at last my mother consented . . . All the neighbours told my mother that it was a dreadful thing to let me, at only fourteen years of age, go to Copenhagen, which was such a long way off, and such a great and intricate city, and where I knew nobody.

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"Yes," replied my mother, "but he lets me have no peace; I have therefore given my consent, but I am sure that he will go no farther than Nyborg; when he gets sight of the rough sea, he he will be frightened and turn back again."

My mother packed up my clothes in a small bundle, and made a bargain with the driver of a post carriage to take me back with him to Copenhagen for three rix dollars banco. The afternoon on which we were to set out came, and my mother accompanied me to the city gate . . .

The postilion blew his horn; it was a glorious sunny afternoon, and the sunshine soon entered into my gay child-like mind. I delighted in every novel object which met my eye, and I was journeying towards the goal of my soul's desires. When, however, I arrived at Nyborg on the Great Belt, and was borne in the ship away from my native island, I then truly felt how alone and forlorn I was, and that I had no one else except God in heaven to depend upon.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN, 1805-1875,
The True Story of My Life

Art and Love

I know that all beneath the moon decays,
And what by mortals in this world is brought
In Time's great periods shall return to nought;
That fairest states have fatal nights and days;
I know how all the Muses' heavenly lays,
With toil of sp'rit that are so dearly bought,
As idle sounds, of few or none are sought,
And that nought lighter is than airy praise.
I know frail beauty's like the purple flower
To which one morn oft birth and death affords;
That love a jarring is of minds' accords,
Where sense and will invassal reason's power.
Know what I list, this all cannot me move,
But that, O me, I both must write and love.

WILLIAM DRUMMOND OF HAWTHORNDEN, 1585-1649

Two Views on Finance

Avarice is the passion of inferior natures; money the pay of the common herd. The author who draws his quill merely to take a purse, no more deserves success than he who presents a pistol.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, 1730-1774

No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1709-1784

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Success Story

When the demand for the work had assured success to *Jane Eyre* her sisters urged Charlotte to tell their father of its publication. She accordingly went into his study one afternoon after his early dinner, carrying with her a copy of the book . . . "Papa, I've been writing a book."

"Have you, my dear?"

"Yes, and I want you to read it."

"I am afraid it will try my eyes too much."

"But it is not in manuscript; it is printed."

"My dear! you've never thought of the expense it will be! It will almost sure to be a loss, for how can you get a book sold? No one knows you or your name."

"But, papa, I don't think it will be a loss; no more will you, if you will just let me read you a review or two, and tell you more about it."

So she sate down and read some of the reviews to her father; and then, giving him the copy of *Jane Eyre* that she intended for him, she left him to read it. When he came in to tea, he said, "Girls, do you know Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?"

MRS. GASKELL, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 1857

Envoi

We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams;
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.

ARTHUR WILLIAM EDGAR O'SHAUGHNESSY,
1844-1881

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LOST SILVER

"You are very welcome, Herr Johann," she said. "Anna is so lonely"

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

I FIRST saw her as I came round a corner, slowly, reflectively coasting through the hot, scented pinewoods which rise steeply from the banks of that deep-set pool of amethyst, the Ströblsee. My first impression was of a solid, substantial woman in a gay cotton frock. She waved to me, not with the flippant, light-fingered flutter of the predatory maiden, but with the authority of age. I stopped my car and drew up beside her. The cool wind ceased to ruffle my hair and, as I came to a halt, I remember how the weight of summer seemed to settle round us, hotter, more aromatic, deeper in mountain silence than I had ever known it before.

"*Grüss Gott!*" she said.

There was a charming shyness and expectancy about her, such as one finds in a child. I remember thinking that she had the gentlest, sweetest voice I had ever heard—a voice out of another world. She looked at me with penetrating, still blue eyes which contained the far suggestion of a smile.

"*Grüss Gott!*" I answered. "Can I help you?"

"I don't know," she said, smiling now with her lips. "It depends where you are going . . ."

A movement of fantasy stirred in my mind and clothed the truth delicately with words.

"I'm going nowhere," I replied, smiling back at her. "Or anywhere. I'm on holiday—just travelling along roads, through forests, over mountains, to please myself."

"Nowhere or anywhere!" she exclaimed. "Then you are surely going to *Nieder Ströbl*—to the *Alpenrose!*"

"Am I?" I asked.

She nodded her head emphatically.

"Of course! You can see it through that gap in the trees—" she pointed with her right forefinger—"you see the house on that little green spit of land that runs out into the lake? That's it. I own it. It's a hotel."

I opened the door of the car and she got in.

"This is more than kind of you," she said, as she settled herself

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in the seat beside me, modestly smoothing down her skirt with her hands. "And my daughter will be so pleased that I have picked up such a presentable man."

She was smiling and matter-of-fact, and spoke without a trace of irony.

I laughed, feeling suddenly shy.

"Will she? I'm so glad!"

Then, as I slipped the car into gear and we began to move, she said, "D'you mind if we don't take the main road? That little turning on the left leads to the lakeside. It's my own private path."

"All right," I said, "you show me the way."

She guided me down a rough track that wound steeply among the dark pines, beyond which the lake lay, blue and translucent. It was very rough and seemed little used, but we reached the bottom safely, and I stopped for a moment to take in for the first time the uninterrupted view of the house on the little green promontory. It was a two-storied wooden building with overhanging eaves, coloured shutters, small balconies, a verandah all round it and a wooden landing-stage jutting out into the lake where boats were moored. The scene was perfect. My rapt enjoyment must have communicated itself to her, vivid as a phrase.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" she said. "A pity that everything is so changed for us, but it can't be helped."

"Changed?" I asked. "How was it before?"

She hesitated for a moment, thinking, then sighed.

"Just as it is now, I suppose," she answered. "Only more—what do the French say?—*mondain*. More people came to us. Today, most of the traffic seems to take the new main road, and it's as though we were out of the world. And the cars that do come through all go to the big hotel at the other end of the lake. It's so dull for my daughter."

"Is business so bad, then?" I asked. "I would have thought with that wonderful position, in the holiday season . . ."

She interrupted me, speaking quickly, "We have had no business for the last two years—none at all."

Her voice shook and I thought she was going to cry. All at once, I sensed a strangeness about her. I felt suddenly, as she spoke, that she was not telling me the whole truth. For a second, gooseflesh stirred under my hair, and I found myself wishing that I had never stopped the car, never begun the adventure at all. Then my curiosity and feeling got the better of me, and I turned to her with sympathy in my heart and said gently, "At least you have a guest tonight, Frau . . .?"

"Mässli," she said.

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"Perhaps I shall change your luck," I said.

"If that were only possible!" she exclaimed, almost in a whisper.

I turned over what she had said in my mind, but I still could not understand how such a place as the *Alpenrose* could remain empty of guests for two years. Perhaps I would understand better when I had seen it at close quarters? The house, so beautiful from far off, might be tumbledown, insanitary, dirty. There might be some terrible secret about her daughter. I could not tell. Anyhow, I reflected, I was committed only for a single night.

I started the car up again, and we drove on over a bumpy grass track, hardly marked by wheels. Five minutes later we were at the door of the *Alpenrose*. I got out of the car first and helped my passenger out. She thanked me charmingly.

We stood and looked at the house, side by side. I could not tell what she felt as we stood there. I only know that I had a sensation as though the doors of my soul were slowly opening, and, through them, into my body, was flowing an exquisite stream of peace, accompanied by a sense of return, of homecoming. It was as though I had been searching for it, unknown to myself, for thirty years, and had, at last, come upon it unawares. I was so moved that I could not speak. I turned to Frau Mässli, searching for words and finding none, but I did not need to say anything.

"You see," she said in her sweet voice, "I was right. You were coming to the *Alpenrose* all the time."

My doubts had left me, and I felt with a tranquil certainty that I was that day beginning something which I would remember always, which might be, if not a treasure, a vivid memory for the rest of my life.

"Yes," I said, suddenly eloquent, "this moment is one of those that come rarely and are very precious. It is as though the earth stores them up, conceived in the womb of time, and bears them only when they have reached perfection."

I listened to myself talking, realizing that what I said was quite outside my daily idiom, like the charmed speeches in a fairy tale.

Then Frau Mässli put a hand on my arm.

"Look!" she exclaimed. There was a note of triumph in her voice.

Round the corner of the house, from the side nearest to the lake, came a girl. The old men of Troy, confronted with the beauty of Helen, may have spoken winged words. But before they spoke, I believe there must have fallen between them a moment of that breathless, absolute silence which precedes all great applause. This same perfect compliment of unspoken praise I paid to the

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newcomer. She stood still as she saw me, and I could feel the silence ring out of me like a voice. The walls of the world closed in on us, and the earth shrank until it was no larger than a green promontory on an Austrian lake. We were alone in the first garden.

"This is my daughter Anna," said Frau Mässli.

The girl had been swimming and she was wearing a blue bathing dress and a tight-fitting white cap. She had dark eyebrows, perfectly arched, and beneath them, her mother's deep blue eyes. Her skin was golden from the sun and diamonds of water sparkled on it. She came over and took my hand. It was a sensation not of holding but of mending. It was not just a handshake, joining for a fleeting second in an act of indifferent courtesy two people quickly to go their ways, but the thankful reunion of two separated limbs at the resurrection of the body. The skin of our hands seemed barely able to keep our blood apart. I looked into her eyes. They shone with intelligence—her own as well as that which is added even to the stupidest woman by a lover—and they contained the same inward smile as I had seen in her mother's eyes. Her first, astounding words were:

"*Mutti!* How did you get him? What is his name?"

She let go my hand slowly. It was like the reluctant ending of a kiss. Then she took off her bathing cap and revealed her hair—short, shining, auburn, full of the lights of autumn beechwoods, dappled with sun. She shook her head like a playful filly foal just let out to grass. I could not take my eyes off her, and a line from Oscar Wilde passed through my mind like a traveller, though I remembered vaguely that it was spoken by a woman about a man: "There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth."

Frau Mässli laughed, amused at our eagerness.

"I found him driving along the road in his car and stopped him," she said. "It was quite easy. His name I have not yet the pleasure of knowing. What is it, Herr . . .?"

"Gresham . . . John Gresham," I managed to stammer out at last.

She took my hand and shook it affectionately, as a mother might her son's when he has become a grown man, before kissing him.

"You are very welcome, Herr Johann," she said. "Anna is so lonely. So very lonely. And, so far, in our difficult situation, we have not managed to do anything about it."

The thought passed through my mind—the first thought after the manner of my normal thoughts that I had had for ten minutes—that the men in the village of Nieder Ströbl must all be blind, and that the male visitors to the "big hotel at the other end of the lake" must all be mad. She seemed by such a very long way the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

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" I add my welcome to that of my mother," the girl said quietly, then, a moment later, she was standing beside me, her arm linked in mine, her hand on my hand. It was just as I wished, but suddenly I was wary. Again, a little fluttering uneasiness passed through me and stirred the region round my heart. It was incomprehension. It was involuntary distrust of being courted by a woman. It was compounded of a longing to accept and a warning to refuse. Her first words sounded in my ears again, " *Mutti*, how did you get him ? " Had she been ugly, it might have been another thing, but this girl ! This girl !

I stood beside her, desperately trying to think clearly about what was happening to me, and failing. All at once, Frau Mässli's voice cut the thread of my thoughts.

" Anna ! Anna ! " she cried. " Thank God for your sake, for this crowning mercy, my dear child ! "

As she spoke, Frau Mässli burst into tears and fled into the house, her face hidden in her hands. The world of people was narrowing again, growing smaller. Anna, from beside me, watched her go.

" How she loves me," she said simply.

Then she sighed, but it was not for sorrow. It seemed to me like a sigh of pure contentment. I felt a gentle pressure on my arm and she moved towards the verandah on the lake side of the house, pulling me with her.

" Come, Johann," she said. Her voice was gentle and shook a little. I added to it, by my loving attention, a deeper sweetness and a greater power than it may in fact have possessed. " There is no time to lose. I have waited for this moment for so long. For two whole years. I thought it would never come."

" What moment ? What moment ? " I murmured, inwardly knowing.

" For this ! "

We had reached the verandah and had the house between us and the road. She quickly disengaged her arm from mine, swung round facing me, and a second later kissed me full on the mouth. She was no inexperienced girl, but a woman, and suddenly it was as though I, too, had been waiting long years for that moment. It was fulfilment, ecstasy. The world had narrowed now to the smallest limits known to mortal man.

For a little time we were conscious of nothing but ourselves. Surely the water still lapped against the wooden landing-stage, the little wind stirred in the trees. There may have been footsteps in the house behind us. The sun may have sunk a little, reddening like a rose the last tips of summer snow on a mountain peak. A bird may have whistled a private tune, unnoticed save by the attentive

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ear of God. We did not know. Locked together, we moved slowly to the warm wooden wall of the house. When she had her back to it, she pushed me away gently with her hands and opened her eyes.

"You kiss like a man I once knew—years ago, almost in another life," she said.

It cut me to the heart. "Anna!" I cried. "Don't!"

At that moment, Frau Mässli came out of a door leading on to the verandah. We separated, but not guiltily.

"Come, children," she said. "I have got your supper. Cold supper—but good. Anna, go up and dress. You'll catch cold."

The girl kissed me softly on the cheek and left us. I suppose I looked bewildered, distracted—such a wound after such happiness! —for the older woman laid a comforting hand on my shoulder and shook her head kindly, but there was a touch of sadness in her expressive face.

"You don't understand, do you, Johann?" she said.

"No," I replied, "I wish I could."

"Perhaps it may be better that you shouldn't. How deeply should we seek to understand the greatest gifts of God? They are things to be accepted: money to be spent on the day. Love and friendship are the most valuable things on earth. May not the wish to understand them be too near to ticketing them with a price, like goods in a shop?"

She consoled me.

Five minutes passed and Anna returned, wearing a simple, coloured cotton frock with a dirndl apron. She looked enchanting and smiled at me. We followed her mother, hand in hand, into the pine-panelled living-room where we sat down to cold chicken, salad and a bottle of Rhine wine. I remember nothing of the conversation. In any event, we said little. It was as though our mouths, the girl's and mine, had said all there was to say, but in other ways. Our silences were not the silences of embarrassment, but of happiness. We looked at each other hungrily while Frau Mässli presided over the meal with pride and joy, from the old German grace—

"Komm' Herr Jesus, sei unser Gast,
Und segne was du uns bescheret hast,"

—to the hot coffee with its rich islands of yellow whipped cream. Afterwards she pushed us out on to the verandah and only saw us again at nine o'clock before she went up to bed. She blessed us, kissed us both tenderly on the forehead one after the other, then spoke to Anna.

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"I have put Johann in the room next to yours at the end of the passage. Come up quietly enough and I shall not hear you . . . Surely you can manage that?" she said, then left us alone.

It was sunset now. The red light of the sky in flames lay on the moving water like the perfect repetition of a poem or the faultless singing of a song. The mountains turned mauve, then purple, then dark blue. The breeze which from time to time had ruffled different parts of the lake, travelling like a gentle, capricious spirit over the surface of the water, finally died away. Smooth as a mirror, the lake finally acquired its heavy night stillness and oily calm; and the black hills lay on it asleep. All this time, we remained sitting silent, hand in hand. I looked at the changing colours of the evening reflected on the skin of Anna's face. She saw that she was being watched, glanced at me once, smiled happily and left me to my small pleasure without a word.

At last she stood up, but I kept her hand and kissed it.

"Look," she said. "The moon is coming up."

A luminous, pale, reflected arc of light appeared from behind one of the dark hills to the left of the lake, above the road which I had travelled in the morning.

"I'll go in and get a sweater to keep me warm, and we'll row about in the track of the moon," she said. "And pick up a boat-load of silver," she added.

"Gold, surely," I said.

"No, silver," she said. "I can see that you are an ignorant fellow, not fit to work in a bank or a serious business."

"I don't," I said.

Five minutes later, we pushed out on to the dark lake, dipping the oars gently in order not to disturb the sleeping world. The moon rose, and side by side, each with an oar, we pulled our small, squat dinghy up the shimmering, reflected track. Sometimes we let it drift and kissed, urgently, as though each kiss were our last action before the end of the world.

When, after an hour, we returned, she stood on the landing stage, slim, pale, corporeal, delicate, and said, looking at me, "You have your load of silver, Johann?"

I nodded. "And you?"

"Yes. It's hidden in every pocket, in every corner of me, in every crevice of my body. My mouth drips silver. I have silver spittle. Tonight I am the richest woman on earth. I could be sold for a fortune, yet the richest man in the world could not buy me. I am too precious. I must be taken. Will you take me, Johann? Then all night you may rob me of my silver and I will

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rob you of yours. And in the morning we shall both be as rich as ever. Richer . . ."

We moored the boat to its rusty iron ring, and followed our moonlight shadows, black and sharp on the ground before us, to the *Alpenrose*. Taking off our shoes, we crept into the pine-plank scented house and up the stairs. They creaked as though we were an army. Sometimes we stopped and clung to each other, laughing silently. If this was the quietness which Frau Mässli had commended to us, I felt it placed a great responsibility on her for the quality of her deafness. But as we passed her room, we stopped and listened through the door to a gentle, measured, beatific snoring. When we reached our rooms, Anna led me into mine and closed the door behind us. We went over to the window and looked out over the small, wooden balcony on to the shining lake. She put her arms round me and kissed me.

"Mother has never snored before in her life," she said, looking at me, smiling. "Isn't that delightful? Really beautiful?"

The strangeness of the thought behind her words no longer meant anything to me. I had Anna and wanted never again to hear of anything else in the wide world. I kissed her. Though now I was finally bewitched and had no sense left in me, no judgment, I made a last, defensive comment.

"A strange mother," I said. "Does she always do this?"

"I don't know," she answered, suddenly on edge. I felt her stiffen in my arms. "I don't know. It hasn't happened for two years and I don't remember before that. Perhaps I was too young, perhaps . . . I don't remember."

She clung to me, trembling. I held her fast and gradually she became quieter. Then she asked me suddenly, "Johann, you will stay here, won't you?"

"Yes."

"Always?"

"Why, no. In a week, my holiday is over and I must be back in London. I shall take you with me—both of you. We shall live in London, and come over here in the summer."

Then a terrible thing happened. Anna began to cry, pitifully. Great tears seemed to be forced out of her eyes by some inward pain, and streamed down her cheeks. She was torn, racked, shaken, broken by sobs. It was many minutes before I could quieten her again. At last she was able to speak calmly.

"Johann," she said, not looking at me, "I can't leave here—ever. And I shall never be able to tell you the reason why. You wouldn't believe it if I did. Besides, perhaps I don't really know myself."

A thought occurred to me. "Anna, are you ill?" I asked.

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"No," she said quickly, then hesitated. "Meaning yes," she added, "meaning I don't know . . . Oh, Johann, let tomorrow take care of all that! After two years, a week's a lifetime! Let's spend our silver, now, while there's time!"

To describe the happiness of our three days at the *Alpenrose* is beyond me. It is not difficult to describe small happiness or humdrum sorrow. These are simple things. But when happiness reaches the last supreme degree, it is always near to breaking. Great happiness is so much of getting and spending, laying itself waste in frantic glory. Such was our happiness. It was rending, breaking, ecstatic, utterly without check. To have lived on that pinnacle for long would have been impossible, but our three days were almost enough to recompense me for all that happened afterwards, to give me enough resignation to accept for the rest of my life, calmly, what came.

On the evening of the third day, the three of us were sitting together over supper, when I said, "Tomorrow, we'll all drive over to Ströbl and get my mail. It was being sent on to me. There may even be a letter from my office. I was going back home through Belgium to do some business on the way."

"Ah, no, Johannchen," said Frau Mässli, "get it when you go at the end of the week—not before. It can wait, surely?"

"No, really, I must get it tomorrow," I said. "I should have gone for it before. It might be important."

Anna stood up quickly, very pale, shaking all over. "Johann, don't go," she said pleadingly. "If you do . . . If you do . . ." she hesitated . . . "I have a terrible feeling you'll never come back. You see, it happened to me once before—just like this, or almost."

The room was suddenly tingling with her hysteria.

"But you can come with me, darling," I said quietly. "Watch me the whole time! I shan't try to escape. How could I? I love you."

The note of hysteria in the room dropped to one of sad hopelessness. Frau Mässli leant across the table, put her hand on mine and said, seriously and kindly, "Dear Johann, she is not able to leave Nieder Ströbl . . ." She raised a hand to prevent me from speaking. "No questions, please, dear Johann. Be understanding, and stay with us as long as you can and, when you go, come back to Anna as soon as you can, if you can. That's all."

She rose, kissed us both and went up to bed.

Late that night, or rather early next morning, I woke up with a start from a bad dream. Anna was gone! The moon had set. It must have been about three in the morning and it was very dark.

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I lay still for a few minutes, waiting for her to return, but nothing happened. Then suddenly, from somewhere, I smelt the faint smell of burning! I leaped out of bed, putting on my dressing gown as I ran, and dashed for the stairs. I hammered on the door of Frau Mässli's room, shouting "Fire!" She came out quickly in her nightdress and we ran down the stairs together. I heard a quick movement inside the kitchen and Anna rushed out, almost colliding with us in the hall.

"Quick! Quick!" she cried. "I went down because I thought I smelt burning. The stove! It was nothing, but it couldn't have been out properly. I spilt some oil on it, moving about in the dark and now it's blazing! Quick!"

We ran together into the kitchen. The stove was a mass of leaping red flames, scorching the wooden walls behind it and the ceiling above it. I smothered it with a rug while the two women filled buckets of water. It was safely under control in ten minutes, but we had been very near to disaster. As soon as it was all over, Anna suddenly collapsed—fainted dead away.

I carried her up to bed, and her mother gave her brandy, forcing it through her clenched teeth.

"Poor child," she said, pityingly, "so much emotion—then this!"

Anna came to slowly and looked at me with dazed, quiet eyes.

"So you're here!" she exclaimed faintly, and smiled up at me. "You will stay with us always now, won't you? Johann, you will stay always?"

"Hush, darling," I said. "You had better sleep. I'll sit here with you until you sleep."

Her mother kissed her and left the room. Soon she slept and I brought my own bedclothes from next door, rolled myself up in them on the floor beside her and slept fitfully until morning.

Driving along the straight, smooth road to Ströbl next day, alone, I was at last able to consider quietly every phase of my short life at the *Alpenrose*, and probe in my mind for a solution to its mystery. It is difficult when you are in a place, deeply in love with a woman, held by every sense, living on her life, delighting in the new world which you have created for one another. Only when you have managed to leave it for a few hours can you conduct an apology for sober reflection.

My departure had been terrible, terrible! I might have been leaving for Siberia, never to return! Both the women cried at first, then, at last, made a show of courage, since I was determined. They cut me enough sandwiches for an army. The package lay beside me now on the seat of the car.

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I remembered how, when I had started the car and was moving forward from the front door, Anna had crossed suddenly in front of me and I had to pull up with a jerk. I had kissed Frau Mässli good-bye a few moments before, and she had returned to the house. Anna got into the car beside me.

"Why don't you come with me?" I had asked. "Do! Surely your mother will let you!"

She shook her head.

"No, darling," she had answered gravely. "I can't. But I'm resigned now to your going. You may even come back."

I had smiled then. I counted on being back late that afternoon.

She continued, "I wanted this last moment to be perfect. To burn my life into yours so that you will never, never forget me, as long as you live."

She had pushed herself into my arms, and looked up at me to be kissed. It had been a terribly long, involved, dramatic farewell. And now it was as though the whole taste and sweetness of her were still on my tongue.

When I had brought myself to turn her out of the car, and was driving slowly along the tree-lined avenue which led from the house to the village, the last I heard of her was an agonized, pleading cry, "Johann! Johann! Come back! Come back!"

I had looked round for a last sight of her just as I reached the village, but by then the *Alpenrose* was no longer visible, hidden behind a screen of tall poplars.

When I entered Ströbl at half-past twelve, I was still no nearer to my solution. I sat down on the terrace outside the *Gasthof Zum Löwen*, under the plane trees, in the sun. The owner came over to my table and introduced himself. He was a pleasant-looking, dark young man, about thirty years old.

"*Grüss Gott!*" he said. "What shall it be, *Mein Herr?*"

"A glass of beer," I said.

In a few minutes, he returned with two glasses, one for me and one for himself. I was glad, because I had intended to invite him to sit with me anyway, so that I could ask him questions about the *Alpenrose* and its inhabitants.

"Also, *Herr Engländer*," he said, "and how do you like Austria?"

I smiled, the vivid memory of Anna in my mind.

"I love it," I said. "And your women are the most beautiful in Europe!"

After all, I knew intimately at least one!

He raised his eyebrows, and nodded his head, pleased.

"Good," he said. "May I ask where the Herr has been staying?"

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"Nieder Ströbl," I replied.

He looked at me hard, and a shadow seemed to cross his face, as though, above us in the sky, a cloud had passed over the sun. He sighed.

"Nieder Ströbl?" he asked. "At the *White Horse*, I suppose?"

It was only courtesy, I felt, that made him reply at all. All life, all enjoyment had left the conversation.

"No," I said. "At a little place beside the lake. The most beautiful girl I ever saw in my life lives there—at the *Alpenrose*."

The man leaped to his feet, pale, his eyes staring.

"The *Alpenrose!*" he cried, choking with sudden tears. "But the *Alpenrose* was burned down two years ago! It has never been rebuilt! The owner and her daughter died together in the fire! They were burned to death!"

I sat there aghast, horrified, feeling the blood drain from my face. "But I slept there last night," I gasped. "Why they even gave me luncheon sandwiches when I left. I was to have returned this afternoon . . ."

I showed him the packet on the table—the sandwiches I had watched them cut that morning, two hours before!

We opened the package between us, tearing at it with our hands. It contained only dry, mildewed crusts, and decayed matter which might once have been meat. Tears poured down the young man's face. When he had recovered a little, he looked at me in despair.

"Forgive me," he said, "but I was her fiancé. We were to have been married that Christmas. She died two days after we had had a quarrel—a lovers' quarrel. From then on, and for ever—now and always—this thing is with me. That she died estranged from me. It is without remedy on earth."

He bowed his head and covered his face with his hands.

For a moment, touched by a selfless pity, beyond tears, I laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. Then suddenly, realizing that it was he whom Anna had loved during her days on earth, I was filled with a more terrible sorrow, a deeper bitterness.

* * *

REDUCING DIET

There is a certain country in South America, many of whose savage inhabitants are such unheard of canibals, that they not only feed on human flesh, but also some of them do actually eat *themselves*, and yet they commonly survive that strange repast.

PATRICK GORDON, F.R.S., *Geography Anatomized; or, a Compleat Geographical Grammer*, published 1693

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PUMPERNICKEL

It took him back forty years, to the finest picnic in history

by RAY BRADBURY

MR. AND MRS. WELLES walked away from the cinema late at night and went into the quiet little café, a combination of restaurant and baker's shop. They settled in a corner, and Mrs. Welles said, " Boiled ham on pumpernickel." Mr. Welles glanced towards the counter, and there lay a loaf of pumpernickel.

" Why," he murmured, " pumpernickel . . . Druce's Lake . . ."

The night, the late hour, the empty restaurant—by now the pattern was familiar. Anything could set him off on a tide of reminiscence. The scent of autumn leaves, or midnight winds blowing, could stir him from himself, and memories would pour around him.

Now in the unreal hour after the cinema, in this lonely café, he saw a loaf of pumpernickel bread and, as on a thousand other nights, he found himself moved into the past.

" Druce's Lake," he said again.

" What ? " His wife glanced up.

" Something I'd almost forgotten," said Mr. Welles. " In 1910, when I was twenty, I nailed a loaf of pumpernickel to the top of my wardrobe mirror . . ."

In the hard, shiny crust of the bread, the boys at Druce's Lake had cut their names: *Tom, Nick, Bill, Alec, Paul, Jack.* The finest picnic in history ! Their faces grew tanned as they rattled down the dusty roads. Those were the days when roads were *really* dusty ; a fine brown powder clouded up after your car. And it was always twice as good to reach the lake as it would be later in life when you arrived immaculate, clean and unrumpled.

" That was the last time the old gang got together," Mr. Welles said.

After that, college, work and marriage separated you. Suddenly you found yourself with some other group. And you never felt as comfortable or as much at ease again in all your life.

" I wonder," said Mr. Welles. " I like to think maybe we all *knew*, somehow, that this picnic might be the last we'd have. You

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first get that empty feeling the day after leaving school. Then, when a little time passes and no one vanishes immediately, you relax. But after a year you realize the old world is changing. And you want to do some one last thing before you lose one another. While you're all still friends, home from college for the summer, this side of marriage, you've got to have something like a last ride and a swim in the cool lake."

Mr. Welles remembered that rare summer morning, he and Tom lying under his father's Ford, reaching up their hands to adjust this or that, talking about machines and women and the future. While they worked, the day grew warm. At last Tom said, "Why don't we drive out to Druce's Lake?"

It was as simple as that.

Yet, forty years later, you remember every detail of picking up the other fellows, everyone yelling under the green trees.

"Hey!" Alec beating everyone's head with the pumpernickel and laughing. "This is for extra sandwiches, later."

Nick had made the sandwiches that were already in the hamper—the garlic kind they would eat less of as the years passed and the girls moved in.

Then, squeezing three in the front, three in the rear, with their arms across one another's shoulders, they drove through the boiling, dusty countryside, with a block of ice in a tin washtub to cool the beer they'd buy.

What was the special quality of that day that it should focus like a stereoscopic image, fresh and clear, forty years later? Perhaps each of them had had an experience like his own. A few days before the picnic, he had found a photograph of his father twenty-five years younger, standing with a group of friends at college. The photograph had disturbed him, made him aware as he had not been before of the passing of time, the swift flow of the years away from youth. A picture taken of him as he was now would, in twenty-five years, look as strange to his own children as his father's picture did to him—unbelievably young, a stranger out of a strange, never-returning time.

Was that how the final picnic had come about—with each of them knowing that in a few short years they would be crossing streets to avoid one another, or, if they met, saying "We *must* have lunch some time!" but never doing it? Whatever the reason, Mr. Welles could still hear the splashes as they'd plunged off the pier under a yellow sun. And then the beer and sandwiches underneath the shady trees.

We never ate that pumpernickel, Mr. Welles thought. Funny, if we'd been a bit hungrier, we'd have cut it up, and I wouldn't

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have been reminded of it all these years later by that loaf there on the counter.

Lying under the trees in a golden peace that came from beer and sun and male companionship, they promised that in ten years they would meet outside the bank on New Year's Day, 1920, to see what they had done with their lives. Talking their rough easy talk, they carved their names on the pumpernickel.

"Driving home," Mr. Welles said, "we sang 'Moonlight Bay'."

He remembered motoring along in the hot, dry night with their swim suits damp on the jolting floor boards. It was a ride of many detours taken just for the hell of it, which was the best reason in the world.

"Good night." "So long." "Good night."

Then Welles was driving alone, at midnight, home to bed.

He nailed the pumpernickel to his wardrobe the next day.

"I almost cried when, two years later, my mother threw it in the dust bin while I was away at college."

"What happened in 1920?" asked his wife. "On New Year's Day?"

"Oh," said Mr. Welles. "I was walking by the bank, by accident, at noon. It was snowing. I heard a clock strike. Lord, I thought, we were supposed to meet here today! I waited five minutes. Not right in front of the bank, no. I waited across the street." He paused. "Nobody turned up."

He got up from the table and paid the bill. "And I'll take that loaf of unsliced pumpernickel there," he said.

When he and his wife were walking home, he said, "I've got a crazy idea. I often wondered what happened to everyone."

"Nick's still in town with his café."

"But what about the others?" Mr. Welles's face was getting pink and he was smiling and waving his hands. "They moved away. I think I know where Tom is." He looked quickly at his wife. "Just for the heck of it, I'll send him this pumpernickel!"

"Oh, but—"

"Sure!" He laughed, walking faster, slapping the bread with the palm of his hand. "Have him carve his name on it and post it on to the others if he knows their addresses. And finally back to me, with all their names on it!"

"But," she said, taking his arm, "it'll only make you unhappy. You've done things like this so many times before and . . ."

He wasn't listening. Why do I never get these ideas by day? he thought. Why do I always get them after the sun goes down?

In the morning, first thing, he thought, I'll send off this pumpernickel to Tom and the others. And when it comes back I'll have the

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loaf just as it was when it got thrown away! Why not?

"Let's see," he said, as his wife opened the door and let him walk into the house to be greeted by silence and warm emptiness. "Let's see. We also sang 'Row Row Row Your Boat', didn't we?"

In the morning, he came downstairs and paused a moment in the strong full sunlight, his face shaved, his teeth freshly brushed. Sunlight brightened every room. He looked in at the breakfast table.

His wife was busy there. Slowly, calmly, she was slicing the pumpernickel.

He sat down at the table in the warm sunlight, and reached for the newspaper.

She picked up a slice of the newly cut bread, and kissed him on the cheek. He patted her arm.

"One or two pieces of toast, dear?" she asked gently.

"Two, I think," he replied.

* * *

WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Sir Henry Savile, Warden of Merton College, Oxford, in the seventeenth century, was a great "book-worm." His wife once remarked:

"I wish I were a book; then you would take more notice of me."

"Aye, madam," he replied, "I wish you were an almanack; and then I could change you once a year."

W. A. PANTIN, *Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, in a lecture*

While Wolsey revelled in the magnificence of his equipage and the lavishness of his banquets, Laud found a royal progress "very tedious, and how I shall be able to bear it God knows: but well or ill it must be borne"; and when the great banquet of the King and Queen at Oxford was over, the Archbishop merely sighed with relief and meticulously counted the spoons.

H. R. TREVOR-ROPER, *Archbishop Laud*

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★*This traveller's tale was written fully a thousand years ago by Buzurg ibn Shahriyar of Hurmuz, and translated into French by L. Marcel Devic from a thirteenth century manuscript.*

ISLAND OF WOMEN

Translated from the French

by PETER QUENNELL

HERE is the story, told me about the island of women by the *nakhoda*, Abou'z-Zahr el-Barkhati, an important personage of Siraf, who had it from one of the women inhabiting these islands. Previously he had been a fire-worshipper, following the practice of the Indians. His word was generally respected and every man was ready to entrust him with his property and the lives of his children. At last he embraced the religion of Islam, made an excellent Musulman and accomplished his pilgrimage.

A man, so he told me, set out in a large ship that belonged to him, carrying a company of merchants of many different nations. Arrived at the sea of Malayou, they drew near the confines of China and had already caught sight of some mountainous eminence of the land, when a sudden and frightful wind sprang up, blowing against the vessel's course, so violent that there was no withstanding it, while the fury of the waves put steering quite out of the question.

The wind drove them towards Canopus. Now whoever, in those seas, is blown so far that Canopus stands right overhead, let that man abandon all hope of return. He is hurried along upon a mass of water, rushing towards the South ; and, as the ship proceeds, the waves are heaped up behind him,—on our side, that is to say—and, on the other side, the flood declines before him. Thus, whatever may be the wind, whether it be fair or foul, all way of escape is shut, and the current draws him down across the immensity of the ocean.

When the ship's company saw that they were rushing towards Canopus, and night had come on, and they beheld thick darkness all around, powerless to steer a course, they despaired of their lives. Now the might of the waves would swing them almost to the clouds and now it plunged them in the abyss.

All night they suffered dense fog, on a pitch-black sea, and when dawn came, they saw it not, for the darkness encompassing them

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and the fog which clung to the inky surface of the water, the ragings of the wind and the trouble and confusion of the sky. And through this long night, hopeless of their safety, given over to the fury of the tempest, upon a boiling sea, buffeted by fearful waves, their vessel bounding, plunging, quivering, creaking, the passengers bade one another goodbye and severally each man invoked the power of the deity he served; for there were among them men of China, India, Persia, and from the Isles. That done, they made up their minds to die.

Thus passed two days and two nights, though night from day they could not tell. And about the middle of the third night, they saw the horizon fronting them glow as with some stupendous fire. Terror seized on them; and addressing themselves to the captain, "Can you not see," they exclaimed, "this fearful glow that fills the horizon, towards which we are being driven? See how it encircles us, and we had rather be drowned than burned. In the name of your god, make the ship founder and us with it in the depths of this gulf, amid this darkness, where, at least, each of us will finish beyond sight of his companions' agony. Do as we ask and you are quit of what befalls us. These last nights and days, have we not died a thousand-thousand deaths? Is it not better to die once for all?"

But the captain answered, "You must realize that travellers and merchants run frightful dangers, dangers far worse than those that daunt you now. Besides, we pilots of the guild have to do our duty, and we swear to let no ship perish till its hour is struck. We pilots, when we go aboard a ship, there our life is and there our destiny: swim and we swim: sink and we sink with it. Have patience, trust yourselves to the good pleasure of the ruler of wind and wave, who bridles the storm as he pleases."

Hearing the captain refuse their plea, the passengers wept, groaned, and bewailed their lot. In vain might the captain bid the boatswain give the crew such and such orders as the situation of the ship rendered expedient; the roar of the sea, hubbub of the clashing waves, bellowing of the wind among the sails and cordage, and the lamentation of the passengers deafened their ears. And the vessel must have gone to the bottom, less by reason of the wind and sea, than by human fecklessness and the confusion which resulted.

There happened to be in the ship a Musulman, native of Cadiz in Spain, who, in the press of embarkation, had escaped the captain's notice and slipped on board the night they set sail. Whereupon he had stowed himself away in a retired corner of the ship, fearing the opprobrium and ill-treatment he might receive did he show his face. But, when he saw how things stood with the ship, the

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dangers they were all running, and how the folly of man conspired with the fury of the waves against their common safety, he incontinently left his hiding-place, come what might of it, and, going up to his shipmates, "What is it?" he demanded. "Has the ship sprung a leak?"

They answered him, "No."

"Is the rudder broken?"

"No."

"Are you being swamped?"

"No."

"What is the matter then?"

"Good Lord," they replied, "you talk just as if you weren't here with us, on this ship! Can't you see the fearful storm, the waves, the darkness which hems us in, hiding sun and moon, so that we cannot steer a course? And look, Canopus stands overhead, and we are the sport of winds and waves. But worse still is that fire towards which we are hurried along, which already fills the whole horizon. We had rather be drowned than burned, and we have begged the captain to let his ship founder, amid this darkness, which would hide us one from another, that we die by water, and not by fire, with the added pain of watching our companions burn with us."

Said the stowaway, "Take me to the captain."

Brought before him, he saluted him in the Indian tongue. The captain, surprised to see an unknown man, returned his salutation and asked him, "Who are you, a merchant or one of their train? We don't remember you as one of the company who set sail with us."

"I am neither a merchant," the man replied, "nor do I belong to their train."

"Why did you come on board, then, and what is it you sell?" the captain answered.

"Why," said he, "I slipped in among the crowd, just as you were setting sail and hid myself in a corner of the ship."

"But how did you live?"

"On a plate of rice, with butter in it, that one of your sailors set down near my hiding-place every day, and a saucer of water too for the guardian angels of the ship. That was how I lived. As to what I have brought to sell, it is a skin of crushed dates."

All this mightily surprised the captain, while the passengers, diverted by the adventure, made an end of their distracted cries; the crew went about its business; at the voice of the boatswain, sails and rigging were put to rights, and the ship was once more got under control.

"Tell me, Captain," said the man from Cadiz, "why were all these people crying and lamenting?"

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"Eh!" he replied. "Can't you understand these waves and winds and this darkness putting them to fright, and, worse still, the glow that fills the horizon, whither the storm is driving us? Now I have scoured these seas ever since I was a child, when I followed my father who had sailed them all his life. I am already past my eightieth year, and I never yet heard tell of anyone who had seen the like of what we see now or had told of any such thing."

"Be calm," said the stranger. "By God's grace, you shall all be saved. What you see is an island, closed in by a rim of mountains, the sea waves breaking against them. At night, it has the look of some tremendous fire and frightens the witless. But, as soon as the sun has risen, the apparition is no more and turns to water. This fire may be seen from Spain; I have seen it there once, and now a second time."

At the stranger's words, there was great joy through the whole ship, fears abated and panic was stilled; they ate and drank. And now the wind slackened and the sea grew smooth, and, with the rising sun, they drew near the island. The sky had cleared, and they reviewed the land and chose a good anchorage. The ship drew in, and all would get ashore. Down on the sand they flung themselves, and rolled upon the blessed earth, and not one soul was left aboard ship.

But, in the midst of their joy, suddenly from the interior of the island there issued a horde of women, God knows how many, and fell on the men, a thousand women or more to every one man, and carried them away towards the mountains and forced them to become the instruments of their pleasure. They fought among themselves without ceasing, and the sturdiest took her man.

One after another, the men dropped off and died of sheer exhaustion. Only one man survived, and he was the Spaniard, of whom a single woman had taken possession. She visited him at night, and at dawn hid him away near the sea, bringing him food.

Presently the wind changed and began to blow in the direction of India, whence the vessel had come. The man laid hands on a little boat, called a *felou*, and, by night, stocked it with water and victuals. The woman, seeing his purpose, led him to a place where she turned back the earth and showed him a mine of gold dust. Together they loaded the boat with it, as full as it would hold. Then together they got on aboard, and, after ten days' journey, reached that port from which the vessel had originally set out. There the man told his tale.

The woman stayed with the Spaniard, learned his tongue, took the Musulman faith, and bore him several children. Questioned

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concerning the island and women who dwell there, without the society of men, this was what she said :

" We come from a land, where are many great cities, encircling the island, the nearest being some three days' and nights' sail distant. The inhabitants, royal as well as simple, worship the nightly fire which shines round the island. They call the island the House of the Sun, because the sun rises at its easterly tip and sinks behind the western shore ; and, as they believe, spends the night in the island. In the morning, at dawn, the night-fire pales and dies out, and, straightway, the sun rises : ' Behold him, behold him,' they cry, and they adore him, prostrating themselves on the ground every one and uttering up prayers. And thus it is when the sun goes down and the fire rises again.

" You must know that it is God's will, that the women of that land should be brought to bed, first of a boy, then of twin girls, and so on for the rest of their lives. So it happened in our country, that there were few men and a superfluity of women, and the women were desirous of ruling them. Then the men fitted out ships, thrust on board some thousands of women, and came to discharge them on this island, saying to their god, the Sun, ' What thou hast created is thine to dispose of ; for us, we have no more hand over them.'

" So the women were left in the island, where, one after another, they died. Since we came there, we never set eyes on man. Not once has a man landed there. For our island is situated in the vastness of the sea, beneath Canopus. No traveller dares leave the shore and security of dry land, fearing lest he be swallowed up in the sea. Thus has the All-Powerful willed it. Blessed be God, the most benign of Creators."

* * *

BREACH OF CONFIDENCE

I remember being told of a case where the charge was one of stealing a pair of breeches. A young barrister, briefed from the dock, defended, and much to his delight, secured an acquittal. The prisoner showed no desire, however, to leave the dock.

" You are free, my man," said the young counsel loftily. " You can leave the dock."

" I'd rather wait," whispered the client, " till the prosecutor leaves the court."

" Why ? " asked the young counsel.

" Because," whispered the client, " I have them on."

J. A. STRAHAN, *The Bench and Bar of England*

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MALICE AFORETHOUGHT

Any kiddie in school can love like a fool,
But hating, my boy, is an art

OGDEN NASH, *Plea for Less Malice Toward None*

Mr. Mitchell had a most serious antipathy to a kitten. He could sit in a room without experiencing the least emotion from a cat; but directly he perceived a kitten, his flesh shook on his bones, like a snail in vinegar. I once relieved him from one of these paroxysms, by taking a kitten out of the room; on my return he thanked me, and declared his feelings to be insupportable upon such an occasion . . . He said that a kitten, after he had looked at it for a minute or two, in his imagination grew to the size of an overpowering elephant.

JOHN THOMAS SMITH, 1766-1833, *A Book for a Rainy Day*

A Traveller's Curse after Misdirection

May they stumble, stage by stage
On an endless pilgrimage,
Dawn and dusk, mile after mile,
At each and every step, a stile;
At each and every step withal
May they catch their feet and fall;
At each and every fall they take
May a bone within them break;
And may the bone that breaks within
Not be, for variation's sake,
Now rib, now thigh, now arm, now shin,
But always, without fail THE NECK.

ROBERT GRAVES, *from the Welsh*

The Judgment

Butt to God I made my Complaint Who signally Lett me see his Justice & Goodness to me, In the fall of my enimise, For soon affter he Came from the Asises, one of Turners eyes dropt outt of his head on his Book, and Aboutt three Month Affter his Wiffe dyed from him, Raveing, And nott long affter God Took him a Way to Accountt for his Perjury. And his son in Law, Captain Asdall thatt Marryed his only daughter, Run Away to the West

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Indies with Another Wife, and all this In the Compass of Little more than half A yeare, as I foretold him by my Letter; Itt was Revealed to me from Above. And for Henry Towrs, my other perjuered oath man, he dyed sudenly & was privatly putt in the Ground for fear of A worse Accident to him . . .

Iff this does nott look like A Judgment &c. I know nott whatt does; & I humbly thank God I am still A Live, and see justice from the hand of God to my enimies.

Journal of MRS. ELIZABETH FREKE *of West Billney, Norfolk*, 1704

Case for the Defence

I am not angry with nobody or his cockeyed, lousy, lying brother.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

One Man's Flowers

. . . that rich man . . . that poisoned the flowers in his garden, because his neighbour's bees should get no more honey from them.

ROBERT BURTON, 1577-1640, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

And Serve Her Right

I have looked him round and looked him through,
Know everything that he will do
In such a case, and such a case,
And when a frown comes on his face
I dream of it, and when a smile
I trace its sources in a while.

He cannot do a thing but I
Peep to find the reason why,
For I love him, and I seek,
Every evening in the week,
To peep behind his frowning eye
With little query, little pry,
And make him if a woman can
Happier than any man.

Yesterday he gripped her tight
And cut her throat—and serve her right!

JAMES STEPHENS, *Nora Criona*

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Imprecation

Lord, confound this surly sister,
Blight her brow with blotch and blister,
Cramp her larynx, lung and liver,
In her guts a galling give her.

Let her live to earn her dinners
In mountjoy with seedy sinners :
Lord, this judgment quickly bring,
And I'm your servant, J. M. Synge.

J. M. SYNGE, 1871-1909, *to a sister of an enemy*

The Last Straw

" Wery nice pork-shop that 'ere, sir . . . Celebrated Sassage factory," said Sam . . . " Why, sir, bless your innocent eyebrows, that's where the mysterious disappearance of a 'spectable tradesman took place four year ago . . . He was the master o' that 'ere shop, sir, and the inwentor o' the patent-never-leavin'-off sassage steam ingine . . .

" A wery happy man he'd ha' been, sir . . . if it hadn't been for his wife, who was a most owdacious wixin. She was always a follerin' him about, and dinnin' in his ears, 'till at last he couldn't stand it no longer. ' I'll tell you what it is, my dear,' he says one day ; ' if you persewere in this here sort of amusement,' he says, ' I'm blessed if I don't go away to 'Merriker. . . .' Arter wich she keeps on abusin' of him for half an hour, and then runs into the little parlour behind the shop, sets to a screamin', says he'll be the death on her, and falls in a fit, which lasts for three good hours—one o' them fits wich is all screamin' and kickin'. Well, next mornin', the husband was missin' . . .

" One Saturday night, a little thin old gen'l'm'n comes into the shop in a great passion and says . . . ' You'll allow me to observe, that as you don't use the primest parts of the meat in the manafacter o' sassages, I think you'd find beef come nearly as cheap as buttons.' . . . ' They're my husband's buttons ! ' said the widder . . . ' In a fit of temporary insanity he rashly converted his-self into sassages ! ' And so he had, sir," said Mr. Weller, looking steadily into Mr. Pickwick's horror-stricken countenance.

CHARLES DICKENS, *The Pickwick Papers*

In Brief—

Oh thou enemy, thy day will come.

Arab Proverb

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DEVOTED CONCUBINE

She was indeed a delectable young woman

by LESLIE BONNET

THE insignificant kingdom of Wu, in China, collapsed fifteen hundred years ago. And there are things to be told that befell there as it was drifting very pleasantly towards its end.

The King, Fou-ch'a, dreamed away the hours on his balcony above the water near Soochow. The companionship of his so-much-loved favourite was all he desired. He listened for the sound of her coming along the Echoing Corridor which he had specially builded for her, so that he could enjoy the exciting echoes of her tiny feet. On summer nights he watched the moonlight dripping from her fingers as she bathed her honeyed body in the black pool below.

When kings so occupy their time, the prospects of individual advancement among their subjects are notably enhanced. And so it is not surprising that the court of the kingdom of Wu had been rent by the contending factions of ambitious officials. It was no longer so rent. The victory of one faction had meant the extinction of the rest. And the victor, Fu Sung, was now the Prime Minister.

In the king's virtual absence he was the real ruler, and equally lucrative, he wielded effective control over the administration of justice.

In these circumstances it was unjust and plainly impolitic for one to own anything which Fu Sung might desire. Almost equally imprudent was it to own anything which anyone else might covet who had the Prime Minister's ear.

And so Me Huai-Ku was doubly unfortunate. He lived in honour and esteem in the broad house of his ancestors in the Street of the Embroiderers in Soochow. He had ripe years and an ample sustenance. He had also a cup of pale jade, so curiously wrought that it was above price. And he lived, in the hope of a son, with his concubine Hsuen-Yen.

This girl, Yen, was in truth too beautiful to possess. She was paler than ordinary. Her classic " phoenix eyes " slanted darkly up to her black hair. Her body was lissom. On her " lily " feet she moved so delicately that she seemed to flow across the floor. Little pointed breasts, too young to swathe, made a mockery of modest garments.

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She was indeed a delectable young woman.

But it was the rare jade cup which excited the cupidity of the Prime Minister, Fu. The girl was feverishly coveted by his assistant T'ang Ch'in. And so Me Huai-Ku, in all innocence, dwelt happily in mortal danger.

Then, one bright morning, when banners and streamers waved gladly in the streets in honour of the Day of Peaceful Rest came messengers from the Prime Minister to Me, demanding with every expression of politeness the jade cup as a gift.

As the officers delivered their message Me felt the first thrill of disaster. With fear and rage eating his entrails and with a discreet smile on his face he thanked them and put them off. Send the poor cup he would not. Duty impelled him to offer it to the illustrious Prime Minister in humble person. He would bring it tomorrow so that the promptness of the presentation might atone for the meanness of the gift.

When the emissaries had gone Me wrapped the jade cup in an old rag and took it quickly to a cunning jeweller. Yielding to flattery, and to threats, the jeweller promised that, working all day and all night, he would have an exact copy made by the next dawn. Then Me went home again, a little easier in mind.

The next morning the jeweller discreetly presented himself before Me with the original and the copied cups. Me took them both in unsteady hands and set them on a lacquer tray before him.

They were very similar. But the copy was not the same. Nor could it be. A Craftsman cannot achieve in twenty-four hours what he would prefer to spend six months upon. The substitute cup seemed to share in the reflected beauty of the real one.

Me put his own cup behind him and studied the copy again. Now it seemed to glow with a grace of its own.

Me decided that the false cup, uncompared, might well be acceptable. So he paid the jeweller with gold.

The old man, his pay withdrawn into his flowing sleeves, bowed low from the waist three times and called down blessings upon the honourable Me, and prepared to withdraw, backwards.

Me checked him. Still seated, deliberately stroking thin moustaches that hung over sleek jowls, Me opened his mind. He told the jeweller that they were now both parties to a deception which was to be practised upon a very powerful person. If the fraud were discovered, Me told him, the artificer of jade would suffer along with Me himself. He outlined in a few dry words a form of death which was repellent, even in the telling, to any person of refinement. It would not be wise therefore, he suggested, to chatter in the tea shop of last night's work.

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The jeweller, aghast, shivered, bowed low again three times and went.

Alone, Me set himself to prepare to visit the Prime Minister, Fu.

As a tribute to his high standing in Soochow, Me held the rank of Chief-Assistant-Tormentor (Second Class). The post was one of honour which involved no onerous duties, but which did carry with it social advantages. He therefore summoned his servant Chang to assist him to don the robes of that office which were proper to be worn for a visit so official.

Chang was old and useless. So he was faithful. He ran here and there, fussed and fumbled with the brilliant robes; while Me loudly cursed his clumsiness.

At last Me was dressed. He flung back the long apricot-coloured sleeves to adjust the official robe more exactly. The gay yellow and crimson folds hung gracefully. The jewelled belt curved down to embrace the round belly of affluence. Chang reverently placed the resplendent hat upon his master's head.

Then Me called softly for his lovely Hsuen-Yen. Not too confident of his return, he had a desire to gaze upon her before he went.

She pattered quickly into the room, her eyes dutifully downcast, black lashes on porcelain cheeks. Old Chang was dismissed.

Shortly afterwards Me set out for the Prime Minister's Court. He walked gravely along the middle of the narrow street, the jostling crowds parting before him. Short, rotund, aloof, he commanded respect. At his heels old Chang followed, bearing in his arms a set of civilian clothes. It was the pleasing humility of officers high and low when visiting a superior, while attending in official dress, to take with them a humble set of garments, in case it should be the superior's desire to remove them from office.

So the little procession passed through the city, Me bearing the false cup, Chang the change of raiment.

Five hours later, hungry and tired, Me found himself in the street again, still in his official gown. He sought Chang angrily, found him gambling in an open-air tea shop, boxed his ears and set off with him back to his jade cup and his beloved Yen.

The audience, the presentation had passed off better than he had hoped. True the waiting had been tiresome, but the great Fu had been affable. Me was still free. His precious jade cup was safe. But as he hurried homeward, puffing with relief, belly wobbling with emptiness, heart faint with love, he would have been less contented had he known what was afoot in the court he had just left.

Among the throng of those about the Prime Minister he had

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not noticed a brisk young man of studious appearance, the assistant T'ang Ch'in. And if he had, he would only have counted it a lucky circumstance. For the young man was morally in Me's debt.

Within the last year, embroiled in a street riot, young T'ang had sought refuge in Me's house. And Me, at some risk, had concealed him there until the following day.

In that house T'ang had had the opportunity of admiring the jade cup—and the lovely Yen.

Well for Me if he had remembered the proverb, "Do a man an injury and let him forgive you. Then you have a friend for life," and its corollary, "No man can forgive being saved." For naturally the obligation to Me under which the ambitious T'ang laboured made him only too anxious to do him injury. And, added to that, the sight he had enjoyed of the acceptable Yen had made him impatient to remove her protector.

When T'ang therefore had time to study the jade cup, and when he was able to detect that it was not the true one, he lost not a moment in telling the Prime Minister.

That great man's rage knew no bounds. In private he beat his forehead, rent his hair. His dignity had been affronted, his standing as a connoisseur had been shaken, his power had been flouted.

The outlook for Me was unpropitious—and brief.

He was at once taken and flung into the Prison of Loud Protests. Fearful that he might talk of the deception and so injure the prime ministerial dignity, he was granted the privilege of speedy death. He was to be beheaded that night.

His house, nevertheless, had not been ransacked. The mighty Fu showed a proper delicacy of feeling in not wishing Me's arrest to appear to have any connection with the ownership of the jade cup. And in any case the goods of a condemned man are forfeited to the state, so that the cup was a ripe plum which would fall into the great one's hands very quickly.

Lonely and bereft, in the Street of Embroiderers the lovely Yen took thought.

The death of so worthy a man seemed to her to be a crime before Heaven and Earth. She therefore, soon after Me's arrest, dressed herself in sombre garments to conceal her youth and attractions, took ample store of Me's gold, and went to discuss business with the gaolers.

They, excellent men, regarding one head as being as good as another, when there was chopping-off to be done, readily agreed, upon honourable terms, to substitute any nominee of Yen's for the distinguished and wealthy prisoner.

The choice of substitute was easy. Yen had long realized that

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old Chang had outlived his usefulness. And she felt sure that death in his master's stead would secure him a favourable reception in the next world.

So under the pretext of taking choice foods to his master she hurried Chang to the Prison of Loud Protests. There he was led, dishes in hand, to the cell from which Me had just been released. The foolish old man, peering into the darkness and calling gently for his master, heard the cell gate slam behind him.

Me and Yen went out quickly, leaving Chang to be comforted by the rude humour of the gaolers during the short time still left to him.

In the dark street Me drew Yen aside and instructed her in the things she must do. Me would leave the city at once and abide, in a safe place, some happy outcome of this trouble. Me had relatives whose influence could be enlisted. Yen was to go to his house, make such lamentation as a bereaved concubine might be permitted, and then, after handing over the house to Me's younger brother, was to withdraw discreetly to Me's country retreat.

Me begged her during this brief interval to remain modest and chaste, both because of the love he had for her and for other more cogent reasons which he did not neglect to describe in clear detail and with some severity.

So Me shuffled meekly out of Soochow by the West Gate, where the soldiers with bored faces watched the two tides of human traffic milling under the great archway; and, with the evening sun on his lowered forehead, made his escape.

Yen, as bidden, went, strait-faced, to the house in the Street of Embroiderers. There she clapped her hands, smote her forehead and uttered harsh cries. She had gongs beaten and caused devil-defying firecrackers to be set off at proper intervals. In short she committed just those uncouth and extravagant breaches of good taste which a young concubine, whose education had been a little one-sided, might be expected to make.

Then she rested and awaited the arrival of Me's brother who would surely come in haste to gather up the inheritance.

But the good Me was passing through a phase in his career when plans miscarried. The first visitor to the house of mourning was not the expected bereaved brother. It was the brisk young man of studious appearance. It was the amorous T'ang.

He stood before Yen, reddened eyes blinking, hands shaking, a fixed smile on his face. His appearance in this way, alone, without friend or intermediary, was highly improper.

To gain time Yen begged him to seat himself. She remained conventionally standing, eyes lowered, wondering what had brought him.

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It was the merest chance that had done so.

The Prime Minister, Fu, responsible as he was for the administration of justice, knew only too well that the due processes of law are subject to miscarriages. Judges may have expensive wives to maintain. Gaolers with no pay, and dependent for their subsistence on donations which prisoners can be persuaded by one means or another to make, are not proof against bribery.

And as, in this case of Me, he was anxious that the law should take its appointed course, he deputed his assistant T'ang to attend at the gaol and to identify the decapitated head as being in very truth Me's head.

But the eager pleasure which the thought of Me's approaching end gave him was not so violent as his desire to own the true jade cup. The thought of being able to brood over its beauty whenever he desired made his lean face darken with delight. And its possession now would assuage the pain of the loss of face which the deception practised on him had involved.

Fu was to retire that evening in order to refresh himself. He therefore instructed T'ang to send a report immediately he had satisfied himself that Me had been well dispatched. This would enable the great one to go to his entertainment with an easy mind.

The young man was then to go at once to the house in the Street of Embroiderers and secure the jade cup. The Prime Minister would be at liberty to receive it from his hands in the morning.

But when T'ang went to the gaol to perform his task, he was handed by the trembling gaolers a head which he knew well was not the head of the honourable Me.

He said nothing to the gaolers, and he did not report at once to his master. For a way to allay the fever which possessed him lay clear before him.

That was why he visited Yen with such haste and barbarous lack of ceremony.

He first in very official style secured possession of the jade cup. Then in hesitating voice he laid bare his chief purpose. He knew that Me was not dead. If he were to report accordingly, Me's picture would be hung up in the city and in every village. He would most certainly be apprehended and his punishment and death would be shared by the perfect one, Yen.

But T'ang had no desire to contrive so unhappy an ending. If Me were dead as Yen pretended, then Yen was free to make fresh arrangements. And who better could she be united to than to T'ang, who by the very act of marrying her would be denied the power of asserting that Me was alive.

Young and untried, Yen still could see the snare.

She dissembled. She drooped yet more submissively. Her

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voice was low and faltering. She had, she confessed, long loved the noble T'ang. Now, happily, she was a widow . . .

T'ang wept silently with delight.

In a short time he recollected himself and hurried outside to his attendants squatting dully against the wall. He sent them swiftly to the Prime Minister with the message that the decapitated head in the Prison of Loud Protests was in truth that of the late Chief Assistant Tormentor (Second Class).

Then he hurried inside.

Yen, her pale face glowing, welcomed him. The night was dark, the streets were unsafe. T'ang showed no inclination to leave. He gazed at Yen with an evident longing quite out of place in a person of breeding. Yen, trembling becomingly before him, asked softly if it would please her great lord to drink a little wine.

The idea was not one which had been in the young man's mind; but Yen evidently took his blank look, as he sought to adjust himself to this fresh thought, for consent, and she bowed seductively and pattered from the chamber.

She brought back on a tray a china cup and a pot of warm rice wine. She poured the steaming fragrance for her master and handed him the cup with such an air of sweet submissiveness that he was persuaded to indulge the pleasure of postponement which drinking imposes.

The teasing interlude passed pleasantly. Yen praised his mighty drinking and plied him with more cups. T'ang began to sit farther back in the great chair; his eyes which were fixed upon her, ceased to focus. His face gradually grew suffused with a copper-coloured flush. T'ang became intoxicated.

To make matters certain Yen then added to his cup the redoubtable "big wine" which is not wine at all but proof spirit flavoured with peaches. It smote the bewildered guest like an axe. He collapsed in his chair, sprawling, in a reek of alcohol.

Yen took the pale jade cup from her second husband's belongings and smashed it deliberately on the tiled floor at his feet.

And as she sped away secretly and swiftly to find her true lord Me, Yen occupied her mind with pleasing reflections on the approaching interview between T'ang and the eminent Fu.

* * *

PRESENT COMPANY . . .

Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits.

MARK TWAIN

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Eastern Love Song

THE roses are filled to their perfumed tips,
With the splendour of stars and jewels of dew,
And the hours are drowned in a sea of flowers,
And night is a song when the night brings you.

A sweet soft song of moonlight and shadow,
The hours of enchantment go by in a dream,
Like an unbroken chain of exquisite flowers
Or the languorous murmur of some sleepy stream.

What is the splendour of stars and of roses?
What are the moonlight and diamonds of dew?
The lonely hours whisper to sorrowful flowers,
And the night is a dirge if it brings not you.

V. P. W.

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THE ENEMY

"Truth and lies," said Mike. "How are those kids going to understand, sir?"

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

THEY sat late at the lunch table and afterwards moved through the dim, cool, high-ceilinged rooms to the Judge's library, where, in their quiet talk, the old man's past and the young man's future seemed to telescope and touch.

But, at twenty minutes past three, on that hot, bright, June Saturday afternoon, the present tense erupted. Out in the quiet street arose the sound of trouble.

Judge Kittinger touched his pince-nez, rose, and led the way to his old-fashioned verandah from which they could overlook the tree-roofed intersection of Greenwood Lane and Hannibal Street. Near the steps to the corner house, opposite, there was a surging knot of children and one man. Now, from the house on the Judge's left, a woman in a blue dress ran diagonally towards the excitement. And a police car slipped up Hannibal Street, gliding to the kerb. One tall officer plunged into the group and threw restraining arms around a screaming boy.

Mike Russell, saying to his host, "Excuse me, sir," went rapidly across the street. Trouble's centre was the boy, ten or eleven years old, a tow-headed boy, with tawny-lashed blue eyes, a straight nose, a fine brow. He was beside himself, writhing in the policeman's grasp. The woman in the blue dress was shouting at him. "Freddy! Freddy! Freddy!" Her voice simply did not reach him.

"You ol' stinker! You rotten ol' stinker! You ol' nut!" All his heart was in the epithets.

"Now, listen . . ." The policeman shook the boy, who, helpless in those powerful hands, yet blazed. His fury had stung to crimson the face of the grown man at whom it was directed.

This man, who stood with his back to the house as one besieged, was plump, half bald, with eyes much magnified by glasses. "Attacked me!" he cried in a high whine. "Rang my bell and absolutely leapt on me!"

Out of the seven or eight small boys clustered around them came overlapping fragments of shrill sentences. It was clear only

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that they opposed the man. A small woman in a print dress, a man in shorts, whose bare chest was winter-white, stood a little apart, hesitant and distressed. Up on the verandah of the house, the screen door was half open, and a woman seated in a wheelchair peered forth anxiously.

On the green grass, in the shade, perhaps thirty feet away, there lay in death a small brown and white dog.

The Judge's luncheon guest observed all this. When the Judge drew near there was a lessening of the noise. Judge Kittinger said, "This is Freddy Titus, isn't it, Mr. Matlin? What's happened?"

The man's head jerked. "I," he said, "did nothing to the dog. Why would I trouble to hurt the boy's dog? I try . . . you know this, Judge . . . I try to live in peace here. But these kids are terrors! They've made this street a perfect hell for me and my family." The man's voice shook. "My wife, who is not strong . . . My step-daughter, who is a cripple . . . These kids are no better than a slum gang. They are vicious! That boy rang my bell and *attacked* . . .! I'll have him up for assault! I . . ."

The Judge's face was old ivory and he aloof behind it.

On the verandah, a girl pushed past the woman in the chair, a girl who walked with a lurching gait.

Mike Russell asked, quietly, "Why do the boys say it was you, Mr. Matlin, who hurt the dog?"

The kids chorused. "He's an ol' mean . . ." "He's a stinker . . ." "Just because . . ." they said. ". . . took Clive's bat and . . ." ". . . chases us . . ." ". . . tries to put everything on us . . ." ". . . told my mother lies . . ." ". . . just because . . ."

He is our enemy, they were saying. He is our enemy.

"They . . ." began Matlin, his throat thick with anger.

"Wait a minute." The second policeman, the thin one, walked towards the place where the dog was lying.

"Somebody," said Mike Russell in a low voice, "must do something for the boy."

The Judge looked down at the frantic child. He said, gently, "I am as sorry as I can be, Freddy . . ." But in his old heart there was too much known, and too many little dogs he remembered had died already; even if he were as sorry as he could be, he couldn't be sorry enough. The boy's eyes turned, rejected, returned. To the enemy.

Russell moved near the woman in blue, who pertained to this boy somehow. "His mother?"

"His folks are away. I'm there to take care of him." She snapped as if she felt herself put upon by a crisis she had not contracted to face.

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" Can they be reached ? "

" No," she said decisively.

The young man put his stranger's hand on that rigid little shoulder. But he was rejected. Freddy's eyes, brilliant with hatred, clung to the enemy. Hatred doesn't cry.

" Listen," said the tall policeman, " if you could hang on to him for a minute . . ."

" Not I . . ." said Russell.

The thin policeman came back. " Looks like the dog got poison. When was he found ? "

" Just now," the children said.

" Where ? There ? "

" Up Hannibal Street. Right behind old Matlin's back garden."

" *My* garden ! " Matlin's colour freshened again. " On the pavement, why don't you say ? Why don't you tell the truth ? "

" We are ! *We* don't tell lies ! "

" Quiet, you boys," the officer said. " Pipe down, now. Hold it."

" Heaven's my witness, I wasn't even here ! " cried Matlin. " I played nine holes of golf today. I didn't get home until . . . May ? " he called over his shoulder. " What time did I come in ? "

The girl on the verandah came slowly down, moving awkwardly on her uneven legs. She was in her twenties, no child. Nor was she a woman. She said in a blurting manner, " About three o'clock, Daddy Earl. But the dog was dead."

" What's that, Miss ? "

" This is my step-daughter . . ."

" The dog was dead," the girl said, " before he came home. I saw it from upstairs, before three o'clock. Lying on the pavement."

" You drove in from Hannibal Street, Mr. Matlin ? Looks like you'd have seen the dog."

Matlin said with nervous thoughtfulness, " I don't know. My mind . . . Yes, I . . ."

" He's telling a lie ! "

" Freddy ! "

" Listen to that," said May Matlin, " will you ? " Her lips smacked.

" He's a liar. She's a liar, too."

The officer shook Freddy. Mr. Matlin made a sound of helpless exasperation. He said to the girl, " Go, keep your mother inside, May." He raised his arm as if to wave. " It's all right, honey," he called to the woman in the chair, with a false cheerfulness that grated on the ear. " There's nothing to worry about, now."

Freddy's jaw shifted and young Russell's watching eyes winced. The girl began to lurch back to the house.

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" It was my wife who put in the call," Matlin said. " After all, they were on me like a pack of wolves. Now, I . . . I *understand* that the boy's upset. But all the same, he cannot . . . He must learn . . . I will not have . . . I have enough to contend with, without this malice, this unwarranted antagonism, this persecution . . ."

Freddy's eyes were unwinking.

" It has got to stop ! " said Matlin almost hysterically.

" Yes," murmured Mike Russell, " I should think so." Judge Kittinger's white head, nodding, agreed.

" We've heard about quite a few dog poisoning cases over in Redfern," said the thin cop with professional calm. " None here."

The man in the shorts hitched them up, looking shocked. " Who'd do a thing like that ? "

A boy said, boldly, " Ol' Matlin would." He had an underslung jaw and wore spectacles on his snub nose. " I'm Phil Bourchard," he said to the policeman. He had courage.

" We jist know," said another. " I'm Ernie Allen." Partisanship radiated from his whole thin body. " Ol' Matlin doesn't want anybody on his ol' property."

" Sure. He doesn't want anybody on his ol' property. It was ol' Matlin."

" It was. It was," said Freddy Titus. " It was. It was."

" Freddy," said the housekeeper in blue, " now, you better be still. I'll tell your dad." It was a meaningless fumble for control. The boy didn't hear it.

Judge Kittinger tried, patiently. " You can't accuse without cause, Freddy."

" Bones didn't hurt his ol' property. Bones wouldn't hurt anything. Ol' Matlin did it."

" You lying little devil . . . ! "

" *He's* a liar ! "

The policeman gave Freddy another shake. " You kids found him, eh ? "

" We were up at Bourchard's . . ." " We were going down to Titus's."

" And he was dead," said Freddy in ringing tones.

" *I* know nothing about it," said Matlin icily. " Nothing at all."

The policeman, standing between, said wearily, " Any of you people see what could have happened, in any way ? "

" I was sitting in my garden," said the man in shorts. " I'm Daugherty, next door, up Hannibal Street. Didn't see a thing."

The small woman in print spoke up. " I am Mrs. Page. I

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live at the corner. I believe I did see a strange man go into Mr. Matlin's garden this morning."

"When was this, Ma'am?"

"About eleven o'clock. He was poorly dressed. He walked up the path and around the garage."

"Didn't go to the house?"

"No. He was only there a minute. I believe he was carrying something. He was rather furtive. And very poorly dressed, almost like a tramp."

There was a certain relaxing, among the elders. "Ah, the tramp," said Mike Russell. "The good old reliable tramp. Are you sure, Mrs. Page? It's very unlikely . . ."

But she bristled. "Do you think I am lying?"

Russell's lips parted, but he felt the Judge's hand on his arm. "This is my guest, Mr. Russell. All of you. Freddy Titus." The Judge's voice was gentle. "Let him go, Officer. I'm sure he understands, now. Mr. Matlin was not even at home, Freddy. It's possible that this . . . er . . . stranger . . . Or it may have been an accident . . ."

"Wasn't a tramp. Wasn't an accident."

"You can't know that, boy," said the Judge somewhat sharply. Freddy said nothing. As the officer slowly released his grasp, the boy took a free step, backwards, and the others surged to surround him. There stood the enemy, the monster who killed and lied, and the grown-ups with their reasonable doubts were on his side. But the boys knew what Freddy knew. They stood together.

"Somebody," murmured the Judge's guest, "somebody's got to help the boy." And the Judge sighed.

The policemen went up Hannibal Street, towards Matlin's back garden, with Mr. Daugherty. Matlin lingered at the corner talking to Mrs. Page. In the front window of Matlin's house, the curtain fell across the glass.

Mike Russell sidled up to the woman in blue. "Any uncles or aunts here in town? A grandmother?"

"Not here," she said, shortly.

"Brothers or sisters, Mrs. . . . ?"

"Mrs. Somers. No, he's the only one. Only reason they didn't take him along, was it's the last week of school and he didn't want to miss."

Mike Russell's brown eyes suggested the soft texture of velvet and they were deeply distressed. She slid away from their appeal. "He'll just have to take it, like everybody else," Mrs. Somers said. "These things happen."

He was listening intently. "Don't you care for dogs?"

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" I don't mind a dog," she said. She arched her neck. She was going to call to the boy.

" Wait. Tell me, does the family go to church? Is there a clergyman who knows the boy? "

" They don't go, so far as I ever saw." She looked at him as if he were an eccentric.

" But school. He has a teacher? "

" Miss Dana," she said. " Oh, he'll be all right." Her voice grew loud, to reach the boy and hint to him. " He's a big boy."

Russell said, desperately, " Is there no way to telephone his parents? "

" They're on the road. They'll be in some time tomorrow. That's all I know." She was annoyed. " I'll take care of him. That's why I'm here." She raised her voice and this time it was arch and seductive. " Freddy, better come wash your face. I know where there's some chocolate cookies."

The velvet left the young man's eyes. Hard as buttons, they gazed for a moment at the woman. Then he whipped around and left her. He walked over to where the boys had drifted, near the little dead creature on the grass. He said softly, " Bones had his own doctor, Freddy. Tell me his name? " The boy's eyes flickered. " We must know what it was that he took. A doctor can tell. I think his own doctor would be . . . best, don't you? "

The boy nodded, mumbled a name, an address. That Russell mastered the name and the numbers, asking for no repetition, was a sign of his concern. Besides, it was this young man's quality, that he listened. " May I take him, Freddy? I have a car. We ought to have a blanket," he added softly, " a soft, clean, old blanket."

" I've got one, Freddy . . . My mother'd let me . . . "

" I can get one," Freddy said brusquely. They wheeled, almost in formation.

Mrs. Somers frowned. " You must let them take a blanket," Russell warned her and his eyes were cold.

" I will explain to Mrs. Titus," said the Judge quickly.

" Quite a fuss," she said and tossed her head and crossed the road.

Russell gave the Judge a quick nervous grin. He walked to the returning policemen. " You'll want to make tests, I suppose? Can the dog's own vet do it? "

" Certainly."

" I'll take the dog, then. Any traces up there? "

" Not a thing."

" Will you tell the boy you are investigating? "

" Well, you know how these things go." The officer's feet

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shuffled. " Probably on Monday, after we identify the poison, we'll check the drug stores. Usually, if it *is* a cranky neighbour, he has already put in a complaint about the dog. This Matlin says he never did. The devil of these cases is we can't prove a thing, usually. If you get an idea who it was, maybe you can scare him. Never heard of a conviction, myself."

" But will you tell the boy . . . ? " Russell stopped, chewed his lip, and the Judge sighed.

" Yes, it's hard on a kid," the policeman said.

When the Judge's guest came back, it was nearly five o'clock. He said, " I came to say goodbye, sir, and to thank you for the . . ." But his mind wasn't on the sentence and he lost it and looked up.

The Judge's eyes were affectionate. " Worried ? "

" Well, sir," the young man cried, " they can't think of a thing to do but feed him. Where, sir, is there an understanding woman's heart in this classy neighbourhood ? I herded them to that Mrs. Allen. But she winced, sir, and she diverted them. She didn't want to deal with tragedy. Didn't want to think about it. She offered cakes and lemonade and games."

" But my dear boy . . ."

" What do they teach the kids these days, Judge ? To turn away ? Put something in your stomach. Take a drink. Play a game. Don't weep for your dead, just skip it. Think about something else."

" I'm afraid the boy's alone," the Judge said gently, " but it's only for the night." His voice was melodious. " Can't be sheltered from grief when it comes. None of us can."

" Excuse me, sir. But I wish he would grieve. I wish he would cry his heart out. Wash out that black hate, d'you see ? I ought to go home. None of my concern. It's a woman's job." He moved and his hand went towards the phone. " He has a teacher. I can't help feeling concerned, sir. May I try ? "

The Judge said, " Of course, Mike," and he put his brittle old bones into a chair.

Mike Russell dialled numbers till he found the right one. " Miss Lillian Dana ? My name is Russell. You know a boy named Freddy Titus ? "

" Oh, yes. He's in my class." The voice was pleasing.

" Miss Dana, there is trouble. You know Judge Kittinger's house ? Could you come there ? "

" What is the trouble ? "

" Freddy's little dog is dead of poison. I'm afraid Freddy is in a bad state. There is no one to help him. His folks are away. The woman taking care of him," Mike's careful explanatory

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sentences burst into indignation, " has no more sympathetic imagination than a broken clothes pole." He heard a little gasp. " I'd like to help him, Miss Dana, but I'm a man and a stranger, and the Judge . . ." He paused.

" . . . is old," said the Judge in his chair.

" I'm terribly sorry," the voice on the phone said slowly. " Freddy's a fine little boy."

" You are his friend ? "

" Yes, we are friends."

" Then, could you come ? You see, we've got to get a terrible idea out of his head. He thinks a man across the street poisoned his dog on purpose. Miss Dana, *he has no doubt.* And he doesn't cry." She gasped, again. " Greenwood Lane," he said, " and Hannibal Street, the south-east corner."

She said, " I'll come. I have a car. I'll come as soon as I can."

Russell turned and caught the Judge biting his lips. " Am I making too much of this, sir ? " he inquired humbly.

" I don't like the boy's stubborn conviction," the Judge's voice was dry and clear, " any more than you do. I agree that he must be brought to understand. But . . ." the old man shifted in the chair. " Of course, the man, Matlin, is a fool, Mike," he said irritably. " There is something solemn and silly about him—it makes him fair game. He's unfortunate. He married a widow with a crippled child, and they were no sooner married than *she* collapsed. So he is unfortunate, and not well off. He is encumbered with that enormous house . . ."

" What does he do, sir ? "

" He's a photographer. Oh, he struggles. Tries his best, and all that. But with such tension, Mike. That poor misshapen girl over there tries to keep the house, devoted to her mother. Matlin works hard, is devoted, too. And yet the sum comes out in petty strife, nerves, quarrels, uproar. And certainly, it cannot be necessary to quarrel with children."

" The kids have done their share of that, I'll bet," mused Mike. " The kids are delighted. A local ogre, to add the fine flavour of menace. A focus for mischief. An enemy."

" True enough," the Judge sighed.

" So the myth is made. No rumour about ol' Matlin loses anything in the telling. I can see it's been built up. You don't knock it down in a day."

" No," said the Judge uneasily. He got up from the chair.

The young man rubbed his dark head. " I don't like it, sir. We don't know what's in the kids' minds, or who their heroes are. There is only the gang. It's all the boy has. What do you suppose it advises ? "

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"What could it advise, after all?" said the Judge crisply. "This isn't the slums, whatever Matlin says." He went nervously to the window. He fiddled with the cord of the blind. He said, suddenly, "From my little summerhouse . . . as I have reason to know . . . you can overhear the gang. They congregate under that oak. Go and eavesdrop, Mike."

The young man snapped to attention. "Yes, sir."

"I . . . think we had better know . . ." said the Judge a trifle sheepishly.

The children sat under the oak, in a grassy hollow. Freddy was in the middle. His face was tight. His eyes never left off watching the house of the enemy. The others watched him, or hung their heads, or watched their own brown hands play with the grass.

They were not chattering. There hung about them a heavy sullen silence, heavy with a sense of tragedy, sullen with a sense of wrong, and from time to time, one voice or another would fling out a pronouncement, which would sink into the silence, thickening its ugliness.

The Judge looked up from his paper. "Could you . . . ?"

"I could hear," said Mike in a quiet voice. "They are condemning the law, sir. They call it corrupt. They are quite certain that Matlin killed the dog. They see themselves Robin Hoods, defending the weak, the wronged, the dog. They think they are discussing justice. They are waiting for dark. They speak of weapons, sir. The only ones they have. Air guns, after dark."

"Great heavens!"

"Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen."

"What are you going to do?"

"Excuse me, sir. I'm going to stop it."

Mrs. Somers was cooking supper when he tapped on the screen. "Oh, it's you. What do you want?"

"I want your help, Mrs. Somers. For Freddy."

"Freddy," she announced loudly with her nose high, "is going to have his supper and go to bed his regular time and that's all about Freddy. Now, what did you want?"

He said, "I want you to let me take the boy to my apartment for the night."

"I couldn't do that!" She was scandalized.

"The Judge will vouch . . ."

"Now, see here, Mr. . . . what's your name, Russell, this isn't my house and Freddy's not my boy. I'm responsible to Mr. and Mrs. Titus. You're a stranger to me. As far as I can see, Freddy is no business of yours whatsoever."

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"Which is his room?" asked Mike sharply.

"Why do you want to know?" She was hostile and suspicious.

"Where does he keep his air gun?"

She was startled to an answer. "In the shed at the back. Why?"

He told her.

"A child's talk," she scoffed. "You don't know much about kids, do you, young man? Freddy will go to sleep. The first thing he'll know, it'll be morning. That's about the size of it."

"You may be right. I hope so."

Mrs. Somers slapped potatoes into the pan. Her lips quivered indignantly. She felt annoyed because she was a little shaken. The strange young man really had hoped so.

Russell scanned the street and then went across to Matlin's house. The man himself answered the bell. The air in this house was stale and had the taste of old grease. There was over everything an atmosphere of struggle and despair. Many things ought to have been repaired and had not been repaired. The place was too big. There wasn't enough money, or strength. It was too much.

Mrs. Matlin could not walk. Otherwise, one saw, she struggled and did the best she could. She had a lost look, as if some anxiety, ever present, took about nine tenths of her attention. May Matlin limped in and sat down, lumpishly.

Russell began earnestly. "Mr. Matlin, I don't know how this situation between you and the boys began. I can guess that the kids are much to blame. I imagine they enjoy it." He smiled. He wanted to be sympathetic towards this man.

"Of course they've enjoyed it." Matlin looked triumphant.

"They call me the Witch," the girl said. "Pretend they're scared of me. The devils. I'm scared of them." She didn't look frightened. Her face was merely lumpy.

Matlin flicked a nervous eye at the woman in the wheelchair. "The truth is, Mr. Russell," he said in his high whine, "they're vicious."

"It's too bad," said his wife in a low voice. "I think it's dangerous."

"Mama, you mustn't worry," said the girl in an entirely new tone. "I won't let them hurt you. Nobody will hurt you."

"Be quiet, May," said Matlin. "You'll upset her. Of course, nobody will hurt her."

"Yes, it is dangerous, Mrs. Matlin," said Russell quietly. His manner reproved that flurry of silly reassurance. "That's why I came over."

Matlin goggled. "What? What's this?"

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" Could I possibly persuade you, sir, to spend the night away from this neighbourhood . . . and depart noisily ? "

" No," said Matlin, bristling, " no, you cannot. I will under no circumstances be driven away from my home." His voice rose. " Furthermore, I certainly will not leave my wife and step-daughter."

" We could manage, dear," said Mrs. Matlin anxiously and the girl's pupils slid across under her half-closed lids.

Russell told them about the talk under the oak, the air gun.

" Devils," said May Matlin, " absolutely . . ." She smacked her lips.

" Oh, Earl," trembled Mrs. Matlin, " maybe we had all better go away."

Matlin, red-necked, furious, said, " We own this property. We pay our taxes. We have our rights. Let them ! Let them try something like that. Then, I think the law would have something to say. This is outrageous. I did not harm that animal. Therefore, I defy . . ." He looked solemn and silly, as the Judge had said, with his face crimson, his weak eyes rolling.

Russell rose. " I thought I ought to make the suggestion," he said mildly, " because it would be the safe thing for you. But don't worry, Mrs. Matlin, please, because I . . ."

" An air gun can blind . . ." she said tensely.

" Or even worse," Mike agreed. " But I am thinking of the . . ."

" Just a minute," Matlin roared. " You can't come in here and terrify my wife. She is not strong. You have no right." He drew himself up with his feet at a right angle, his podgy arm extended, his plump jowls quivering. " Get out," he cried. He looked ridiculous.

Whether the young man and the bewildered woman in the chair might have understood each other was not to be known. Russell, of course, got out. May Matlin hobbled to the door and as Russell went through it, she said, " Well, you warned us, anyhow." And her lips came together sharply, once more.

Russell plodded across the pavement again. Long enchanting shadows from the lowering sun struck aslant through the golden air and all the old houses were gilded and softened in their green setting. He moved towards the big oak. He squatted on the ground. The sun struck its golden shafts deep under the boughs. " How's it going ? " he asked.

Freddy Titus looked frozen and still. " O.K.," said Phil Bourchard with elaborate ease. Light on his owlish glasses hid the eyes.

Mike opened his lips, hesitated. Supper time struck on a nearby clock. Calls, like chimes, were sounding.

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"There's my Mum," said Ernie Allen. "See you after."

"See you after, Freddy."

"O.K."

"O.K."

Mrs. Somer's hoot had chimed with the rest and now Freddy got up, stiffly.

"O.K.?" said Mike Russell. The useful syllables which can take on any meaning at all were asking, "Are you feeling less bitter, boy? Are you any easier?"

"O.K.," said Freddy. The same syllables shut the man out.

Mike opened his lips. Closed them. Freddy went across the lawn to his kitchen door. There was a brown crockery bowl on the back step. His sandal, rigid on the ankle, stepped over it. Mike Russell watched, and then, with a movement of his arms, almost as if he would wring his hands, he went up the Judge's steps.

"Well?" The Judge opened his screen door. "Did you talk to the boy?"

Russell didn't answer. He sat down.

The Judge stood over him. "The boy . . . The enormity of this whole idea *must* be explained to him."

"I can't explain," Mike said. "I open my mouth. Nothing comes out."

"Perhaps *I* had better . . ."

"What are you going to say, sir?"

"Why, give him the facts," the Judge cried.

"The fact is . . . the dog is dead."

"There are no facts that point to Matlin."

"There are no facts that point to a tramp, either. That's too sloppy, sir."

"What are you driving at?"

"Judge, the boy is more rightfully suspicious than we are."

"Nonsense," said the Judge. "The girl saw the dog's body before Matlin came . . ."

"There is no alibi for poison," Mike said sadly.

"Are you saying the man is a liar?"

"Liars," sighed Mike. "Truth and lies. How are those kids going to understand, sir? To that Mrs. Page, to the lot of them, truth is only a subjective intention. 'I am no liar,' says she, says he, 'I *intend* to be truthful. So do not insult me.' Lord, when will we begin? It's what we were talking about at lunch, sir. What you and I believe. What the race has been told and told in such agony, in a million years of bitter lesson. Error, we were saying. Error is the enemy."

He flung out of the chair. "We know that to tell the truth is

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not merely a good intention. It's a damned difficult thing to do. It's a skill, to be practised. It's a technique. It's an effort. It takes brains, takes watching, takes humility and self-examination. And it's a science and an art . . .

"Why don't we tell the kids these things? Why is everyone locked up in anger, shouting 'Liar' at the other side? Why don't they automatically know how easy it is to be, not wicked, but mistaken? Why is there this notion of violence? Because Freddy doesn't think to himself, 'Wait a minute. I might be wrong.' The habit isn't there. Instead, there are the heroes. The big-muscled, noble-hearted heroes with guns, blind in a righteousness totally arranged by the author. Excuse me, sir."

"All that may be," said the Judge grimly, "and I agree, but the police know the lesson. They . . ."

"They don't care."

"What?"

"Don't care enough, sir. None of us cares enough, about the dog."

"I see," said the Judge. "Yes, I see. We haven't the least idea what happened to the dog." He touched his pince-nez.

Mike rubbed his head wearily. "I don't know what to do except sit under his window the night through. That hardly seems good enough."

The Judge said, simply, "Why don't you find out what happened to the dog?"

The young man's face changed.

"Of course, it may not be possible to get a true answer . . ."

"But all we need, sir," said Mike slowly, "is to teach Freddy how to ask for it. Just to ask for it. Just to want it." The old man and the young man looked at each other. Past and future telescoped. "*Now*," Mike said. "Before dark."

Supper time, for the children, was only twenty minutes long. When the girl in the brown dress with the bare blonde head got out of the shabby car, the gang was again in its hollow under the oak. She went to them and sank down on the ground. "Ah, Freddy, was it Bones? Your dear little dog you wrote about in the essay?"

"Yes, Miss Dana." Freddy's voice was shrill and hostile. "I won't be touched!" it cried to her. So she said no more but sat there on the ground and presently she began to cry. There was contagion. The simplest thing in the world. First one of the smaller ones, whimpering. Finally, Freddy Titus, bending over, and her arm guiding his head. And then he lay weeping in her lap.

Russell, up in the summerhouse, closed his eyes and praised

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the Lord. In a little while, he swung his legs over the railing and slid down the bank. "How d'you do? I'm Mike Russell."

"I'm Lillian Dana." She was quick and intelligent and her tears were real.

"Fellows," said Mike briskly. "You know what's got to be done, don't you? We've got to solve this case."

They turned all their woeful faces.

He said, deliberately, "It's just the same as a murder. It is a murder."

"Yes," said Freddy and sat up, tears drying. "And it was ol' Matlin."

"Then we have to prove it."

Miss Lillian Dana saw the boy's face lock. He didn't need to prove anything, the look proclaimed. He knew. She leaned a little and said, "But we can't make an ugly mistake and put it on Bones' account. Bones was a fine dog. Oh, that would be a terrible monument." Freddy's eyes turned, startled.

"It's up to us," said Mike gratefully, "to go after the real facts, with real detective work. For Bones' sake."

"It's the least we can do for him," said Miss Dana calmly and decisively.

Freddy's face lifted.

"The trouble is," Russell went on quickly, "people get things wrong. Sometimes they don't remember exactly . . . they make mistakes."

"Ol' Matlin tells lies," said Freddy darkly.

"If he does," said Russell cheerfully, "then we've got to prove that he does. Now, I've worked out a plan, if Miss Dana will help us. You pick a couple of the boys, Fred. We'll have to go to all the houses round about and ask some questions. Better pick the smartest ones. To find out the truth isn't easy. It's very hard," he challenged.

"And then?" said Miss Dana in a fluttery voice. She seemed to have a foreboding.

"Then they, and you, if you will . . ."

"Me?" She straightened. "I am a school teacher, Mr. Russell." Her grey eyes blinked in dismay. "Won't the police . . . ?"

"Not before dark."

"What are *you* going to be doing?"

"Dirtier work."

She bit her lip. "It's interfering. It's . . . not done."

"No," he agreed. "You may lose your job."

She wasn't a bad-looking young woman. Her eyes were fine. Her brow was serious but there was the ghost of a dimple in her

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cheek. Her hands moved. "Oh well, I can always take up beauty culture or something. What are the questions?" She had a pad of paper and a pencil half out of her handbag and looked alert and efficient.

Now, as the gang huddled, a warm sense of conspiracy was growing. "Going to be the dickens of a job," Russell warned them. And he outlined some questions. "Now, don't let anybody fool you by taking a sloppy answer," he concluded. "Ask how they know. Get real evidence. But don't go to Matlin's. I'll go there."

"I'm not afraid of him." Freddy's nostrils flared.

"I think I stand a better chance of getting the answers," said Russell coolly. "Aren't we after the answers?"

Freddy swallowed. "And if it turns out . . . ?"

"It turns the way it turns," said Russell, rumpling the tow head. "Choose your henchmen. Tough, remember."

"Phil. Ernie." The children who were left out wailed as the three small boys and their teacher who wasn't a lot bigger rose from the ground.

"It'll be hard going, Mr. Russell," Miss Dana said grimly. "Whoever you are, thank you for getting me into this."

"I'm just a stranger," he said gently, looking down at her face. "But you are a friend and a teacher." Pain crossed her eyes. "You'll be teaching now, you know."

Her chin went up. "All right, boys. I'll keep the paper and pencil. Freddy, wipe your face. Stick your shirt in, Phil. Now, let's organize. . ."

It was nearly nine o'clock when the boys and the teacher, looking rather exhausted, came back to the Judge's house. Russell, whose face was grave, reached for the papers in her hands.

"Just a minute," said Miss Dana. "Judge, we have some questions."

Ernie Allen bared his teeth and stepped forward. "Did you see Bones today?" he asked with the firm skill of repetition. The Judge nodded. "How many times and when, please?"

"Once. Er . . . shortly before noon. He crossed my garden. Going east."

The boys bent over the pad. Then Freddy's lips opened hard. "How do you know the time, Judge Kittinger?"

"Well," said the Judge, "h'm . . . let me think. I was looking out of the window for my guest and just then he arrived."

"Five minutes to one, sir," Mike said.

Freddy flashed around. "What makes you sure?"

"I looked at my watch," said Russell. "I was taught to be

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exactly five minutes early when I'm asked to a meal." There was a nodding among the boys and Miss Dana wrote on the pad.

"Then I was mistaken," said the Judge, thoughtfully. "It was shortly before one. Of course."

Phil Bourchard took over. "Did you see anyone go into Matlin's garden?"

"I did not."

"Were you out of doors or did you look up that way?"

"Yes, I . . . When we left the table. Mike?"

"At two-thirty, sir."

"How do you know that time for sure?" asked Freddy Titus.

"Because I wondered if I could with politeness stay a little longer." Russell's eyes congratulated Miss Lillian Dana. For she had made them a team, and on it Freddy was the how-do-you-know-what-makes-you-sure department.

"Can you swear," continued Phil to the Judge, "there was nobody around Matlin's back garden then?"

"As far as my view goes," answered the Judge cautiously.

Freddy said promptly, "He couldn't see much. Too many trees. We can't count that."

They looked at Miss Dana and she marked on the pad. "Thank you. Now, you have a cook, sir? We must question her."

"This way," said the Judge, rising and bowing. "Also, there are peanut butter sandwiches."

Russell looked after them and his eyes were velvet indeed. He met the Judge's twinkle. Then he sat down and ran an eye quickly over some of the sheets of paper, passing each on to his host.

Startled, he looked up. Lillian Dana, standing in the door, was watching his face. "Oh, me!" he said.

She drawled, "Oh, you! Oh, me, too!"

"You don't know the half of it," he groaned.

"Do you think, Mike . . ." Paper drooped in the Judge's hand.

Mike said, "Oh, I wonder . . . This is . . . not funny!"

"We can't stop," she challenged.

"May need some support, sir." The Judge rose. "And tell me, sir, where Matlin plays golf. And the number of the Salvage Department . . . No, Miss Dana, we won't stop. We'll take it where it turns."

"We must," she said.

It was nearly ten, when the neighbours began to come in. The Judge greeted them soberly. The Chief Constable arrived. Mrs. Somers, looking grim and uprooted in a crepe dress, came. Mr. Matlin, Mrs. Page, Mr. and Mrs. Daugherty, a Mr. and Mrs.

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Baker, and Diane Bourchard who was sixteen, all came. They looked curiously at the tight little group, the boys and their teacher.

Last of all to arrive was young Mr. Russell, who slipped in from the dark verandah, accepted the Judge's nod, faced the rest and called the meeting to order.

" We have been investigating the strange death of a dog," he began. " Chief Constable Anderson, while we know your department would have done so in good time, we also know you are busy, and some of us," he glanced at the dark window pane, " couldn't wait. Will you help us now ? "

The Chief said, genially, " Of course, that's why I'm here." It was the Judge and his stature that gave this meeting any standing. Naïve, young, a little absurd, it might have seemed had not the old man sat so quietly attentive among them.

" Thank you, sir. Now, all we want to know is what happened to the dog." He looked about him. " First, let us demolish the tramp." Mrs. Page's feathers ruffled. Russell smiled at her. " Mrs. Page saw a man go down Matlin's garden path this morning. The Salvage Department sent a lorry to pick up rags and papers which at ten-forty-two was parked in front of the Daughertys'. The man, who seemed poorly dressed in his working clothes, went to the tool shed behind Matlin's garage, as he had been instructed to do. He picked up a bundle and returned to his lorry. Mrs. Page," purred Mike to her scarlet face, " the man was there. It was only your opinion about him that proves to have been, not a lie, but an error."

He turned his head. " Now, we have tried to trace the dog's day and we have done remarkably well, too." As he traced it for them, some faces began to wear at least the ghost of a smile, seeing the little dog frisking through the neighbourhood. " Just before one," Mike went on, " Bones ran across the Judge's garden to the Allens' where the kids were playing ball. Up to this time, no one saw Bones *above* Greenwood Lane or *up* Hannibal Street. But Miss Diane Bourchard, recovering from a sore throat, was not in school today. After lunch, she sat on her verandah directly across from Mr. Matlin's back garden. She was waiting for school to be out, when she expected her friends to come by." Diane twisted her bracelets.

" She saw, not Bones, but Corky, an animal belonging to Mr. Daugherty, playing in Matlin's garden at about two o'clock. I want your opinion. If poisoned bait was lying there at two o'clock, would Corky have found it ? "

" Seems so," said Daugherty. " Thank God Corky didn't." He bit his tongue. " Corky's a show dog," he blundered.

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" But Bones," said Russell gently, " was more like a friend. That's why we care, of course."

" It's a damned shame ! " Daugherty looked around angrily.

" It is," said Mrs. Baker. " He was a friend of mine, Bones was." The temperature was rising.

" Go on," growled Daugherty. " What else did you dig up ? "

" Mr. Matlin left for his golf at eleven-thirty. Now, you see, it looks as if Matlin couldn't have left poison behind him."

" I most certainly did not," snapped Matlin. " I have said so. I will not stand for this sort of innuendo. I am not a liar. You said it was a conference . . ."

Mike held the man's eye. " We are simply trying to find out what happened to the dog," he said. Matlin fell silent.

" Surely you realize," purred Mike, " that, human frailty being what it is, there may have been other errors in what we were told this afternoon. There was at least one more mistake, as I will show you."

" Mr. and Mrs. Baker," he continued, " worked in their garden this afternoon. Bones left the children to visit the Bakers' dog, Smitty. At three o'clock, the Bakers, after discussing the time carefully, lest it be too late in the day, decided to bathe the said Smitty. When they caught him, for his ordeal, Bones was still there.

" So, you see, Miss May Matlin, who says she saw Bones lying on the pavement *before three o'clock*, was mistaken."

Matlin twitched. Russell said sharply, " The testimony of the Bakers is extremely clear."

The Bakers, who looked alike, both brown outdoor people, nodded vigorously.

" The time at which Mr. Matlin returned is quite well established. Diane saw him. Mrs. Daugherty, next door, decided to take a nap, at five past three. She had a roast to put in at four-thirty. Therefore, she is sure of the time. She went upstairs and from an upper window, she, too, saw Mr. Matlin come home. Both witnesses say he drove his car into the garage at three-ten, got out, and went round the building to the right of it, *on the weedy side*."

Mr. Matlin was sweating. His forehead was beaded. He did not speak. No one spoke.

Mike shifted papers. " Now we remark that the kids trooped up to Phil Bourchard's kitchen at about a quarter to three. Whereas Bones, realizing that Smitty was in for it, and shying, like any sane dog, away from soap and water, went up Hannibal Street at three o'clock sharp. He may have known in some doggy way where Freddy was. Can we see Bones loping up Hannibal Street, going *above* Greenwood Lane ? "

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"We can," said Daugherty. He was watching Matlin. "Besides he was found above Greenwood Lane, soon after."

"No one," said Mike slowly, "was seen in Matlin's back garden, except Matlin. Yet, almost immediately after Matlin was there, the little dog died."

"Didn't Diane . . . ?"

"Diane's friends came at three-twelve. Their evidence is not reliable." Diane blushed.

"This . . . this is intolerable!" croaked Matlin. "Why *my* back garden?" He looked sick. "Why there?"

Daugherty said, "There was no poison lying around my place, I'll tell you that."

"How do you know?" begged Matlin. And Freddy's eyes, with the smudges under them, moved to Russell's face. "Why not in the street? From some passing car?"

Mike said, "I'm afraid it's not likely. You see, Mr. Cranavon was standing at the corner of Hannibal Street and Lee Street. Trying to get a lift. Anything thrown from a car there, he ought to have seen."

"Was the poison quick?" demanded Daugherty. "What did he get?"

"It was quick. The dog could not go far after he got it. He got cyanide."

Matlin's shaking hand removed his glasses. They were wet and he could not see.

"Some of you may be amateur photographers," Mike said. "Mr. Matlin, is there cyanide in your cellar darkroom?"

"Yes, but I keep it . . . most meticulous . . . no one could . . ." Matlin sounded as if he were going to choke. He did choke. He began to cough.

When the noise of his spasm died, Mike said, "The poison was embedded in a meat roll which was roughly half beef and the rest pork and veal." Matlin encircled his throat with his fingers. "I've checked with four butchers and the dickens of a time I had," said Mike. No one smiled. Only Freddy looked up at him with solemn sympathy. "Meat like this was delivered to at least four houses in the vicinity. Meat that was one half beef, one quarter pork, one quarter veal, was delivered at ten this morning to Matlin's house."

A stir like an angry wind blew over the room. The Chief Constable made some shift of his weight so that his chair creaked. All three of the boys seemed wan and terrified.

"It begins to look . . ." growled Daugherty.

"Now," said Russell sharply, "we must be very careful. One more thing. The meat had been seasoned."

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" Seasoned ! "

" With salt. With . . . thyme."

" Thyme," groaned Matlin and his eyes bulged. His hand worked at his collar. " No," he said. " No, please . . ."

Freddy looked up at Miss Dana with bewildered eyes. She put her arm around him.

" As far as motives are concerned," said Mike quietly, " I can't discuss them. It is inconceivable to me that any man would poison a dog." Nobody spoke. " However, where are we ? " Mike's voice seemed to catch Matlin just in time to keep him from falling off the chair. " We don't know yet what happened to the dog." Mike's voice rang. " Mr. Matlin, will you help us to the answer ? "

Matlin said thickly, " Better get those kids out of here."

Miss Dana moved but Russell said, " No. They have worked hard for the truth. They have earned it. And if it is to be had, they shall have it."

" You know ? " whimpered Matlin.

Mike said, " I called your club. I've looked into your dustbin. I can guess. But you can tell us."

Daugherty said, " Well ? Well ? " And Matlin covered his face.

Mike said, gently, " I think there was an error. Mr. Matlin, I'm afraid, did poison the dog. But he never meant to, and he didn't know he had done it."

Matlin said, " I'm sorry . . . it's . . . I can't . . . She means to do her best. But she's a terrible cook. Somebody gave her those damned herbs. Thyme . . . thyme in everything. She made me up a packed lunch. I . . . couldn't stomach it. I bought my lunch at the club."

Mike nodded.

" I never . . . you see, I didn't even know it was meat the dog got. She said . . . she told me the dog was already dead."

" And of course," said Mike a trifle coolly, " in your righteous wrath, you never paused to say to yourself, ' Wait, what did happen to the dog ? ' "

" Mr. Russell, I didn't lie. How could I know there was thyme in it ? When I got home, I had to get rid of the food she'd given me . . . didn't want to hurt her feelings. She tries . . . tries so hard . . ." He sat up suddenly. " But what she tried to do today," he said with his eyes almost out of his head, " was poison *me* ! " His bulging eyes roved. They came to Freddy. He gasped. He said, " The little dog saved my life ! "

" Yes," said Mike quickly, " the little dog has saved your life, since your step-daughter would have kept trying."

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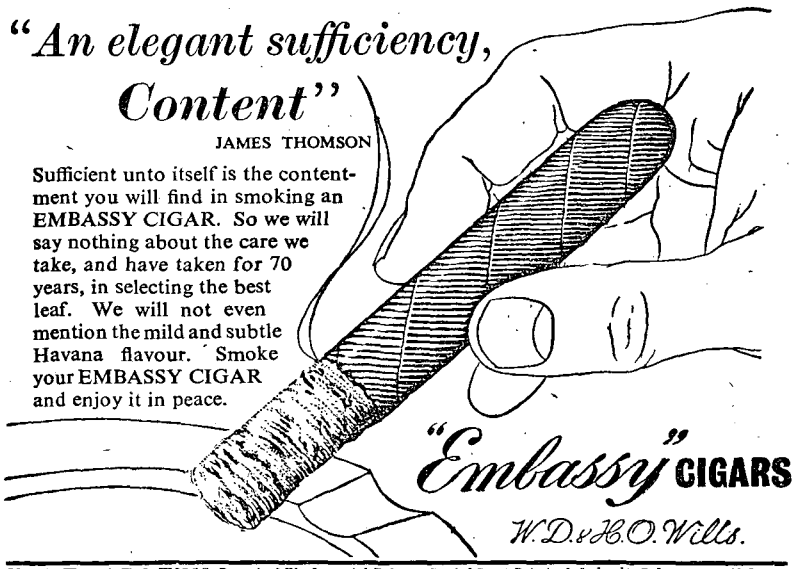

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People drew in their breaths. " The buns are in your dustbin," Mike said. " She guessed what happened to the dog. Went for the buns, hid them. She was late getting to the disturbance. And she did lie."

Chief Anderson rose. The Judge said, " A doctor . . ."

" Her mother . . ." said Matlin frantically. " Her mother . . ."

Mike Russell put his hand on the plump shoulder. " Her mother's been in torment, tortured by the rivalry between you. Don't you think her mother senses something terribly wrong ? "

Miss Lillian Dana wrapped Freddy in her arms. " Oh, what a wonderful dog Bones was ! " She covered the sound of the other voices. She crooned in his ear. " Even when he died, he saved a man's life. Oh Freddy, you will miss him, but he was a wonderful dog."

And Freddy, not quite taking everything in yet, was released to simple sorrow and wept quietly against his friend.

When they went to fetch May Matlin, she was not in the house. They found her in the Titus' tool shed. She seemed to be looking for something.

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ICS

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The Judge, Russell and Miss Dana came to tell them all about it.

Mrs. Titus wept. Mr. Titus swore. He wrung Russell's hand. " . . . for stealing the gun . . . the air gun . . ." he babbled. " . . . before she . . ."

But the mother cried, " . . . for showing him, for teaching him . . . Oh, Miss Dana. Oh, my dear ! "

The Judge waved from his verandah as the dark head and the blonde drove away.

" I think Miss Dana likes him," said Ernie Allen.

" How do you know for sure ? " said Freddy Titus.

* * *

ANSWERS to PETS' CORNER on page 44

1. *The dog, Flush, in " Flush, a Biography," by Virginia Woolf. Flush spent years at the bedside of his mistress, Elizabeth Barrett, in Wimpole Street. When she married Browning, Flush went with them to Italy and freedom.*
2. *The glass unicorn owned by the young girl, Laura, in " The Glass Menagerie," the play by Tennessee Williams.*
3. *The Nightingale in the fairy tale of that name, by Hans Andersen. She preferred the woods to life at Court, but to please the Emperor she sang at his window.*
4. *Io, turned into a heifer by Jupiter, who was in love with her. Juno commended the heifer's beauty so that Jupiter gave it to her. The story is told in Virgil's " Aeneid " and Ovid's " Metamorphoses " (full marks for either source).*
5. *Tobermory, the cat owned by Lady Blemley in the short story, " Tobermory," by Saki. He learnt to talk and shocked a house party by his candid comments.*
6. *The hippopotamus in the poem, " I Had a Hippopotamus," by Patric Barrington. He was found to be a " hippopotamissis " and about to become a mother, so the owner's housekeeper shot him.*
7. *Modestine, the donkey, in " Travels with a Donkey," by R. L. Stevenson. The " Travels " lasted twelve days, during which Modestine learned to admire but not to obey her master.*
8. *Harvey, the phantom rabbit who was the companion of Elwood P. Dowd in the play, " Harvey," by Mary Chase.*
9. *The gold-fish seen by Selima the cat in the poem, " On a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes," by Thomas Gray.*

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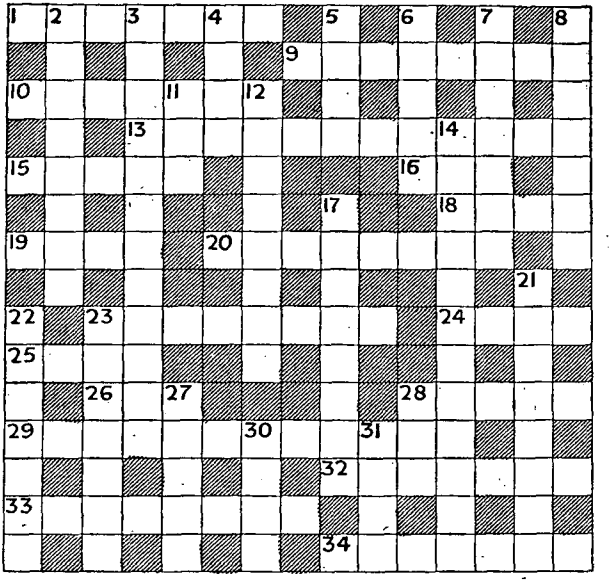
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 61



CLUES

Across

1 The kind of set to give a clear reception? (7).
9 They mark their selections with an X (8).
10 Am eaten, though probably not by this creature (7).
13 No easy Magyar in the past (4, 5, 3).
15 Weep at the entrance to a vault (5).
16 Decree to perform? (3).
18 "The water, like a witch's —— Burnt green, and blue and white" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge) (4).
19 A fair one will give you brighter knitting (4).
20 Her broken melody has gained nothing up to this point (8).
23 Bombast for the gods, with the required response to the fore (8).
24 Expedite matters, particularly the central one (4).
25 Injunction to Britannia (4).
26 "To drop some golden —— of perfect song Into our deep dear silence" (Elizabeth Barrett Browning) (3).
28 What Wells saw of things to come (5).
29 Lacunae in the past of man (7, 5).
32 You'll need a month before this exam to describe a civic dignitary (7).
33 Shows how a novice can get thin in the Alps (8).
34 To separate and come to a retarded conclusion (7).

Down

2 Concerning apprehension? Or repetition of it (8).
3 One would be mistaken in expecting to find them in a Post Office (5, 7).
4 The last word (4).
5 It's right in front of you! (4).
6 An artist who's after a couple of hundred in Africa! (5).
7 He considered himself "More an antique Roman than a Dane" (7).
8 If you upset the soup, see, you'll have to get married (7).
11 To make lace either way (3).
12 Sounds as if these canines had visual functions too (8).
14 To its lochs is the traveller bound, no doubt, when visiting this part of the country (8, 4).
17 "And sworded —— Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed" (John Milton) (8).
21 Natural factory for a beverage (3, 5).
22 Here's the Archbishop, putting his head round the edge (7).
23 So cruel to bring the debate to an end (7).
27 These belong to William by all accounts (5).
28 It's the limit (3).
30 Hamlet's rude forefathers weren't awake, according to him (4).
31 Irritates horses (4).

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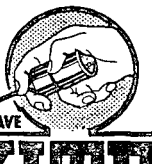

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